Notes on Best Practices in Online Learning from the Student Perspective
Compiled by the Learning Centers

Students compiled a list of what they would like their instructors to know this semester to best help them succeed in an online environment. This was collected from peer leaders (and therefore does not represent first-year students) during a training session to help them reflect on the ways they can best support students through their peer leader roles. The notes below are a compilation of their responses, organized by theme.

Organization & management of online materials:
- In order for students to keep track of their work, they need clearly defined goals and a schedule of due dates and deadlines.
  - Put these in multiple places because it's easy to miss an assignment with online classes, particularly when different courses organize their course shells differently.
  - Send an email once a week with upcoming deadlines and assignments.
- Break long assignments into smaller chunks so they are easier to manage.
- Keep one simple, central source for communicating information. Student emails are getting flooded so it's easier to miss information, therefore, limiting emails would be helpful.

Compassion & demonstrated care:
- Be more patient, lenient, sympathetic, and understanding with deadlines and internet shutdowns.
  - Allow students to have more time to submit the work.
  - Students have work from multiple classes.
  - Understand struggles of long hours of screentime at once.
  - We're in the middle of a pandemic so not everything is normal. People are losing income and losing loved ones.
  - Not everyone has their own rooms/study space.
  - Have open notes exams and extra credit opportunities.
- Many students have technological limitations that make it difficult to fully participate in class and not everyone has the means to do everything.
  - Not everyone has high-speed, steady internet.
  - Not everyone knows how to operate technology.
  - Some students rely on physical interaction and social aspects of learning.
- Be proactively sympathetic in the way you plan the course vs reactively sympathetic in responding to individual students
- Be accessible and approachable for students to ask questions.
- Professors should know that students are interacting primarily with their professors so the instructors should act as a resource for student support services. They should also provide mental health resources and be able to identify stressors.
  - Students don't all have emotional outlets during this time.

Physical & cognitive challenges of online learning:

- Incorporate breaks in class or allow students to go stretches because students can become disengaged and sleepy.
  - Come up with something fun and engaging.
- Distribute the grading so that not one final exam determines your final grade.
- More work is being assigned than usual to students. A lot of students feel that they receive busy work. Students still have their own responsibilities at home to complete.
  - I.e. professors have 3 hours of online classes then 3 hours of content offline.
- Living in different time zones so synchronous exams or lectures would be difficult to attend. Professors need to be more accommodating for this.
  - Be more understanding of international students.
- Expectations of students are less defined and more ambiguous/vague for online classes. Students can't tell if they are doing too little or too much.
- Exams seem to be more difficult, possibly because instructors assume students are using outside resources to complete their exams.

Engagement with course content and activities:
- Do not make it a requirement to have audio and camera on.
  - Having audio off on a video call can mean that students don't want background noises from everyone in the lecture.
- Be flexible in ways for students to participate in the course.
- There's a gap in how students and professors use technology i.e. slang and symbols in the chat.
- Allow students to work together in class to ease the stress and workload.
- Have discussion-based learning activities such as forums to create a sense of community.
- Professors are assigning most grades based on consistent participation, but it disregards home/mental/emotional states that could affect student engagement.
- It's hard to find groups for group work since most students don't know people from their classes.
- Offer incentives for students to attend office hours.
- Have check-ins after exams/quizzes in case there are problems or things need to be changed.