

# JFYNet Podcast – March 2020 – From Face-to-Face to Online Classes with Dr. Marrapodi

with Dr Michael Marrapodi, Dean of Online Education at Cambridge College and Greg Cunningham, Blended Learning Specialist

**GREG:** *Today's podcast will provide some tips and strategies for teachers transitioning to online courses and features. Dr Michael Marrapodi, Dean of Online Education at Cambridge College. This podcast was created by JFY Networks, a Boston based nonprofit provider of blended learning programs to schools. JFY's blended instructional support programs, build skills and help raise individual and school performance measures. JFYNet's Blended Learning program brings online assessments and curriculum into the classroom and works with teachers to provide individualized instruction to help students achieve measured, skilled gains.*

*Many teachers often wonder whether an online course can be as effective as a face to face course. And, as Dr. Marrapodi explains, the potential is absolutely there.*

**DR. MARRAPODI:** So I get the same type of question from time to time about academic rigor and for our purposes. And with most of the schools that I've worked with in the past, we make sure that at the outset, the course learning outcomes are identical between the course that's offered in seat and the course that's offered online or whatever the modality might be for that particular course. That's the first step. Secondly, when we're presenting course material, we make sure that we're using substantially similar material between the two courses. From a practical standpoint, in essence, every student who is in an online course is in the front row of the class. In an in-seat course, students can basically hide out. They can participate in the class by simply being there, but they never have to make a contribution to the class. And the larger the class, the less contribution each individual student is going to make. However, in an online class, particularly in the discussion forums, everyone must participate if they wish to get a passing grade. And so this prompts them to explore the material, explore the learning outcomes for that particular week, respond to the discussion, prompt and then engage in a dialogue with each other. This would not happen in-seat course, or if it did, it would be restricted to a very few students interacting with the instructor. And while everyone has the opportunity to listen, it would be very unusual for everyone to participate in every discussion, question or every question that is being posed by the instructor. We also can publish lectures, post them right in the online class, whether those are developed by individual instructors or by learning designers so that the students are gaining the same content as they would in an in-seat class. My feeling is it's actually more difficult to participate in an online class because you can't hide.

**GREG:** *One of the most important parts of any online course is the interaction between students and instructors using whatever means are available. As Dr Marrapodi describes:*

**DR. MARRAPODI:** The best way to keep students engaged would be to respond to their individual posts in a discussion area and then ask them a follow up question to extend their

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understanding of the topic or their interaction with the topic and the objectives for the week. My experience has been that when students are when as an instructor, I respond with student, and then I asked him a question, they go back and they consider that and then they'll make a follow up response and we can keep the conversation going back and forth in that way multiple times so that they are fully engaged in that particular conversation. And then that just moves from week to week to week.

**GREG:** *Not seeing students in the classroom every day will not only be an adjustment for teachers, but for students as well. During the unprecedented suspension of classroom instruction, teachers can work with students to manage as much independent learning as possible.*

**DR. MARRAPODI:** Well, I recently read an article. I think it was just yesterday about the fact that we're probably not doing classic online education right now, but we're doing crisis education. So moving things into an online platform does not, in effect, establish an online course...that takes quite a bit of energy and the work of learning designers and assessment designers, content experts. It can take five or six months or more to develop a well put together online class. What we're asking instructors to do now is to move enough of their information and enough of their material online. Keep the students engaged in the short term. We're not asking them to record lectures were not asking them to create interactive elements or simulations. All of these things would be present in a well-designed online class. At this point, what we're asking from our instructors is that they produce some information for the students to respond to whether that's reminding them of a chapter of the text book to read, perhaps a PDF of a journal article, a video that they can watch that supports the learning objectives and then to craft a discussion question and then a follow up assignment. Very, very basic elements. And as long as the instructor is comfortable using the learning management system, they shouldn't have any problem with the content.

**GREG:** *While some schools may already have online platforms available to teachers and students, there are free resources is available to help teachers provide instruction to students.*

**DR. MARRAPODI:** It really would depend on the subject. What I find is that YouTube probably has better Resource is when it comes to visual representations of various topics. But certainly Khan Academy and others like that could be useful. If they are connected to a college or university. They should have a video service embedded in their college library, and they range. So it wouldn't matter if I gave the name because I have a college has it or they don't. But whatever video platform their library has access to would probably a good place to start for content videos.

**GREG:** *Instructors can also seek out creative ways to be accessible to their students using available online platforms*

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**DR. MARRAPODI:** Sure, depending on the learning management system they're using, they may have access within that system to some type of group chat or conferencing software. We use Zoom. Other learning platforms use Big Blue Button, and so I would strongly recommend that they have live synchronized sessions with their students. If the students are already accustomed to having a particular class at a particular point in time, on a particular day, those sessions could continue, and at the very least, the instructor could review the material for the week, giving something akin to a mini lecture and then soliciting questions from and feedback from the students. While that's not exactly the face to face experience that most instructors are accustomed to, it can replicate that at a fairly sophisticated level. And if they are using Zoom, particularly, they can create breakout rooms so they could break the class up into small groups, and they can move from one group to the next to the next, just as if they had done that in a classroom setting and they were walking around the room and listening in on the group discussions that were going on. So there are a number of possibilities to replicate that in person experience, you really can't over overestimate the importance of personal contact. And so, if that's a daily email, if that's a weekly synchronous conversation around a zoom call or something like that, having discussion questions, maybe more than one week, with specific due dates so that the students are brought back into the setting repeatedly during the course of the week.

**GREG:** *Cambridge College already has many of the tools in place in order to help their students and instructors during the campus-wide shutdown.*

**DR. MARRAPODI:** We've been very fortunate in that many of our instructors were already familiar with Zoom and had used it for a variety of meetings. We happen to have multiple campuses, one located in California, two in Massachusetts in addition to our Charlestown campus and then another campus in Puerto Rico. So Zoom is just a way of life for us and bringing students up to speed. We've, as a matter of fact, several weeks ago, we had already started putting together training materials for faculty and students on Zoom and then the same thing for our online platform, so that would be a little...they would have a little less experience with that. But almost everyone has experienced with Zoom. So we have found so far, now, we're only 48 hours into this process because we literally stopped our courses on Tuesday night, March 17th. So today [Wednesday] will be the first day that everything works remotely and we'll see how that goes, obviously. But so far, things have worked very well, and the people who made the transition already have been reporting back that things have gone smoothly. The students, the attendance is fine, and interaction has been fine, so we're fairly confident that we're going to make this transition without too much difficulty.

**GREG:** *But even schools who have top notch plans in place should expect some glitches to occur. More options for access by students and faculty can help continuity should one of those options become unavailable.*

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**DR. MARRAPODI:** Oh, absolutely. It's not to say that there aren't students out there without the correct technology or there are students who, perhaps they're going to run into issues in terms of health or health of family members. This is an ongoing, literally, minute by minute experience for all of us. So, yes, I would assume that there are going to be issues that will come up over time. But we have distributed our email contact information. We all have access to our office phones. We have constant communication through Skype Business so that we are able to respond to any and all we have. We have a 24/7 technology line, we have brought them all up to speed on how to use Zoom, how to use our learning management system so they can answer questions as they come through in real time and not have to forward those questions to another party to answer them. We've tried to smooth out as many of the bumps in the road as we can anticipate.

**GREG:** *The key advice offered by Dr. Marrapodi is time management by both students and teachers in order to find some sense of structure to their day while working to continue academics.*

**DR. MARRAPODI:** The key to being successful as an online instructor or an online student is time management. I often give my students the example that time is like a pie (as in pumpkin pie). It doesn't get any bigger because you want to carve out a new slice...the other slices have to get smaller. And so that might mean making adjustments and jobs schedules, making adjustments with family. But really having a plan as to how I'm going to use my time each day of each week in getting ready for either the work that is now coming my way or what I need to do to prepare my students to be successful in the course. So we're typically goal oriented in our society. We love lists and goals and targets, and this is the time to bring all of that to bear so that you know exactly what has to happen because it is Wednesday at 10 a.m. And you can move forward from there and then help your students to set up those kinds of schedules so that they can be successful.

**GREG:** *We hope this podcast has given you useful information about strategies for success in transitioning from face to face to online courses. And we thank Dr Michael Marrapodi of Cambridge College for providing his insight and expertise. If you have any comments or questions, feel free to navigate to our website: [www.jfynet.org](http://www.jfynet.org) You can also find us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. Thank you for joining us. This has been a production of JFY Networks.*