

**Returning to Work after a Stoppage**  
**Learning and Teaching Development Committee**  
**4 February 2008**

Now negotiations are over, it is time for us all to return to classes and to teach in what are slightly unusual working conditions. After a work stoppage, it is essential to establish, as soon as possible and preferably within that first class, a **comfort zone** within which professors and students, can establish a **collaborative working relationship**. How each one of us will do this depends upon our individual personalities (a known factor) and the attitudes of the students within the classroom (an unknown factor). Here are some ideas for establishing a positive relationship from that first day.

**First:** take a deep breath, stretch, don't panic, and above all try not to worry. Be confident in your own powers of teaching and look upon this as a learning experience. For example, you now have an excellent opportunity to sit down with each of your classes on the first day back and discuss the current and absolutely unique **teaching and learning situation**. You might consider asking this question: "What can I do, in cooperation with my class, not just to save, but to make the most of this academic term?"

**Second: Try to think of this as a positive experience** which you can use to build something new at our university. In other words, in what innovative ways can you take pressure off yourself and your students so that **TOGETHER**, students and faculty can achieve the basic goals that you set with your students in the altered circumstances in which you will now be teaching?

**Third:** If you wish to keep teaching in the same way, even if the teaching and learning circumstances have altered, that is not a problem. Back to work as usual is a perfectly good response to this situation. Fray Luis de León, who taught in the University of Salamanca in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, was jailed for five years by the Spanish Inquisition. When he returned to the lecture podium, after that five year stoppage, he began his first lecture with the famous words "*Como decíamos ayer ...*" / "As we were saying yesterday." At this particular moment in time, I would recommend strongly that we look forward, rather than back, and that we plan, with our students "What we will do tomorrow."

**Fourth:** Even if it is business more or less as usual, there are certain approaches you may wish to consider to reduce the anxiety which faculty and students will most certainly feel. For example, without compromising academic standards in any way, is there material you can eliminate? Can you eliminate or shorten a paper (8 pages instead of 10)? Can you eliminate a test? Can you set less reading material? At the level of **teaching outcomes**, I would recommend that you ask yourself: what do I really want the students to get out of this lesson, this week, this chapter, this month, this term? You should also be aware of your **teaching objectives**; you should make them as clear as possible; you should make your students aware of exactly what you are doing and why you are doing it.

You may, like many other people, feel isolated, somewhat desperate, and lost. Whatever you feel, that is probably how your students are feeling too. If, for example, you are in the middle of a full year course, then you will probably have lost the rhythm and the structure that you had in the first term. Students may even be in the middle of, or about to start, a series of pre-arranged presentations. Ask your class, if you want, how they think the term can be best restarted and how, in their opinion, you can work **together** to regain or (re-)establish a suitable class rhythm in the fastest and most efficient manner. The inclusion of the students, at this stage, will be an important factor in **the re-establishment of a positive learning and teaching environment**.

While many teachers (and I am emphasizing the teaching aspect of our profession), will be happy to return to the tried and trusted methods, others might find this to be an excellent opportunity for experiment and innovation. This might be a good time to look at the outline you are currently preparing, circulate it to your students, and discuss it with them in that first class. Ask the question openly: is this the sort of outline that they would expect from this

particular class under these circumstances? **Start a dialogue on teaching and learning**, point out the most important elements of the course and explain why you feel they should be studying these particular things. Get student feedback, listen to it, and redesign your course outline, with the students if you wish, in such a way that you move forward together with a mutual agreement on what you will teach and how you will teach it. Remember, students will need reassurance that (a) the course will be a positive learning experience and that (b) there will be no negative reactions against students.

At a deeper level, you may be able to take advantage of this moment to experiment with a different style of teaching, for example **Case Based Learning** or **Problem Based Learning**, in which students research and think for themselves, learning the methods of investigation, research, and access rather than reading and repeating content. In **CBL & PBL** there is often a more intense in-depth learning experience, though less material is usually covered. Is there some form of **Experiential** or **Transformational Learning** that can take place inside (or outside) your classroom? Again, this can transform teaching and learning, as can **Outcome Based Education**.

If you notice that any of your students are suffering from stress and/or anxiety (and you know your students better than anyone) I have been told that there will be regular workshops on stress and anxiety management arranged by the Dean of Students Office. These will be posted on the university website.

I will be available (EC208, ext. 465, email: rgmoore@stu.ca) to help you redesign your course outline or to assist you in assessing any **teaching and learning** problems that may arise from your return to class. In addition, if there is anything I, or any other member of the **Learning and Teaching Development Committee**, can do over the next two weeks to help any one of you rethink your course design or rewrite your course outline, we will be ready and most willing to do so. Meanwhile: think positive, think change, and think innovation! This is a challenging situation: let us think about some of the many innovative ways in which we – together with the students in our classes -- can rise to that challenge.

With all best wishes,

**Roger Moore,**  
**Director of Teaching and Learning,**  
**on behalf of the Learning and Teaching Development Committee**  
**(Roger Moore, Sharon Murray, Monika Stelzl, James Whitehead)**