

Editor's Introduction

In early March 2020, a group of University System of Georgia (USG) faculty developers met at Valdosta State University for a bi-annual Regents Advisory Committee meeting. A tight-knit group, there would normally have been lots of hugging and hand-shaking, but with the first cases of the coronavirus spreading through the country we instead elbow-bumped and bathed ourselves in hand sanitizer. Having not yet learned about social distancing, we all went out to dinner and happily packed in without a thought. Social interactions still felt fairly normal then, but just a few weeks later in mid-March, I decided to postpone lunch with a friend and former colleague “until this blows over.” That was the first time that my social plans changed because of the virus. Then, there was the first time that I said “no” to my children who wanted to have a sleepover, the first time I wore a mask in public, the first time a faculty member redesigned an assignment for remote instruction, the first time a student logged on to the learning management system from their home rather than going to class, and on and on.



Teaching and Learning Center representatives share a dinner after a bi-annual GA-CTL RAC meeting.

First-time experiences can leave us feeling tentative and unsure, but as educators we are equal to the task of leading others through them. We are used to introducing learners to new concepts and ideas, and at our cores we ourselves are lifelong learners. Faculty members are spending their summer designing blended/hybrid/HyFlex/flipped courses, and students and faculty alike are preparing for a fall semester unlike any we have seen before. Life has been strange of late, but it continues to move forward, and we continue to engage and plan as best as possible.

When we sent out the call in mid-January, 2020 for essays for Volume 2 of *Engaged Student Learning: Essays on Best Practices in the University System of Georgia*, most people in the United States had never heard of the coronavirus. Essays poured in from nominees of the Regents' Teaching Excellence Awards—the University System of Georgia's highest recognition of teaching in the state—as did volunteers willing to act as peer reviewers. Then, one day before the March 13 submission deadline, the twenty-six public institutions that comprise the University System of Georgia were told that, based on the governor's recommendation, all institutions would suspend instruction for two weeks to give state officials time to assess the situation, and to provide faculty and staff time to test continuity plans and prepare for online instruction. Days later, it was announced that campuses would be closed for the remainder of the spring semester. By early April, it was decided that summer classes would also be taught remotely, and studies-abroad were cancelled. Fall plans remained in question. Faculty and students were forced to become not just familiar with but proficient in means of remote instruction that many had never encountered before, and issues like bandwidth and equity became major topics of conversation. Accompanying these numerous transitions was the stress of trying to keep faculty, staff, and students—and their families—both physically and mentally healthy. With college campuses, K-12 schools and daycare facilities closed, faculty found themselves teaching the remainder of spring semester from home, sometimes with small children competing for their attention. This was the unprecedented backdrop to the assembly of Volume 2.

Many of this volume's reviewers are directors and staff from centers for teaching and learning (CTLs) on our campuses. When I sent these essays out for review, literally the week after we were told that institutions would remain closed for the rest of the semester, many reviewers were extraordinarily busy preparing their campus faculties for the shift to remote instruction, helping to prepare continuity plans, and designing and delivering remote workshops to help faculty with everything from developing a plan to communicate with students and adding quizzes to the learning management system, to seeking out some form of personal work/life balance in this new reality. Despite the upheaval, uncertainty, and increased workload, every reviewer came through with thoughtful and timely feedback, and every author—themselves preparing for an uncertain fall semester—remained engaged throughout the revision and publication processes. A few authors even updated their essays to reflect on how the content and contexts were impacted by the coronavirus.

As summer draws to an end and faculty plan for the fall semester, I read these essays and cannot help but feel that they were written in another time, having taken somewhat for granted a focus on aspects of teaching in the classroom. None of us knows what lies ahead, or what the future holds for the traditional face-to-face classroom, but I do know that faculty everywhere will rise to the occasion and continue to make every effort to enable meaningful learning experiences for their students.

Denise P. Domizi, Editor
Director of Faculty Development
University System of Georgia