

Faculty and students adapt to big changes in spring semester

Michael Manny, Online Editor

In the two months since the Glendale Community College community left campus for spring break, life has changed significantly.

Students taking in-person classes shifted to online learning. Employees are working remotely.

Over a few weeks, faculty had to move their in-person courses completely online, some not having as much experience with teaching online as others. With recorded lectures, Google meets and other online aspects replacing in-person elements.

For communications faculty Michelle Jackson, that transition was not too stressful, as she usually teaches in-person, online and hybrid (blended online and in-person instruction) classes every semester. With this experience, she has been mentoring faculty members that do not have experience teaching online.

Jackson said that she sees how the switch to online learning can be challenging for students used to in-person classes.

“They (in-person students) just didn’t get one class put online, mine, they got, you know, four or five classes put online,” Jackson said. “So, for them, they didn’t sign up for an online course, they signed up for a traditional course. So, from their perspective, its completely overwhelming because they’re in-class learners.”

With that in mind, Jackson has made herself as available as possible to help her students and answer their questions.

“I answer their emails every single day, I mean, I get up just like I’m going to work every day and I log right onto the computer,” Jackson said. “I tell them that I can have phone calls, we can do a Google Chat, we can do Facetime, we can do whatever we need to do to help them out.”

For geology faculty Dr. Gary Calderone and his department, the transition online has been challenging, but he said in an email that his students seem to be succeeding.

“I can tell you that my department colleagues and I have been working 60 plus hours per week without days off since late spring break to pull off the conversion,” Calderone said.

Philosophy and world religions department chair Peter Lupu also teaches a combination of online and in-person classes and had much of his material for in-person classes already online. However, Lupu said there are things in the classroom that are very hard to replicate online.

“I in my classes (sic) very frequently spend quite a lot of time after class talking with students outside the classroom. Well, that is not really available online on a regular basis,” Lupu said. “It is a natural process of when you leave a classroom, some students will gather around and ask questions and discuss things.”



Students are taking finals remotely after classes shifted online for the rest of the semester due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (Michael Manny/The Voice)

Faculty also said that they have worried about the wellbeing of their students during a frightening time. Jackson said that she knows that school may not be on the top of students' minds at this time. She has been sending her students positive letters to continue to motivate and encourage them and has created discussion posts on Canvas, asking her students questions like how they are feeling, and how their families are doing.

"I really just try to personalize it a lot more so that they know that they're cared about, that I want them to be successful and passed," Jackson said.

"First thing is of course, you want to teach them, but they're a human being and they have feelings, so I really try to take that into consideration," Jackson said. "First and foremost, are they okay, and then what we're learning is second, because if they're not okay, then they're not going to be able to learn."

Lupu and Jackson also have been flexible with assignment due dates for students that need the support.

"Students may not be able to fulfill assignments at a timely fashion because they might have to take care of relatives or themselves or other things," Lupu said. "So, we really need to be very flexible. We need to be very sensitive to see what their needs are."

GCC is also offering resources to help support students and families, partnering with St. Mary's Food Bank to offer a drive-thru food pantry. Chromebook computers were also passed out for students that needed a device to complete schoolwork. School resources like academic advising, counseling and library assistance are still being offered remotely. Tips on adjusting study habits for online learning have also been provided.

Students adjusting to new circumstances as well

Kendra Sabel is a speech communications major in GCC and Northern Arizona University's "Connect2NAU" program, who was working on her final semester capstone project. For her capstone, Sabel was arguing that communication is a human right, and extreme restrictions of it were cruel and unusual punishment. After in-person classes shifted, the project was cancelled because of its difficulty to complete online.

Sabel said that the switch to online classes has been a big adjustment because she has always been a hands-on learner who has done best in a group setting.

"There's been a huge decrease of motivation and kind of a lack of wanting to get things started, which is not something I'm used to," Sabel said.

Sabel said that she is an extrovert who likes to go out and socialize in big groups. Since she is unable to do that, she has been focusing on doing other things that make her happy, and practicing "positive acknowledgement" a skill she learned in her program.

"When you're positively acknowledging people, you're taking the time to look at them, ask them how they're doing, and going beyond the surface level of that," Sabel said. "Even my interactions with Walgreens employees, or wherever I do go for work and getting necessary supplies, I ask how they're doing, how they're coping with this time period."

With a very different finals week underway, Jackson has this advice: Do not give up.

"If you are working a lot, you need to communicate with your teachers, they're there for you," Jackson said. "Say 'hey, I'm working 60 hours a week, I am an essential worker, I need some extra time, I need help.' They're all very supportive, but whatever you do, just don't give up and stop."