**Top Ten Lessons Learned**

Dealing with Uncertainty around Distance Education (DE) and Virtual Operations

**Number 10: Metacognition and thinking about our own views as they relate to DE and work from home arrangements**

Our deeply ingrained personal attitudes towards remote work had to be examined. We have an ongoing challenge with trying to slow down, and reflect, so we are better able to think rationally and adjust to new realities.

**Number 9: Focus – It’s okay to say “no”**

Like many, we solicited input from far and wide and tried to model others’ best practices for the transition. We learned quickly, however, that we really had to focus and say “no” to a lot of good ideas if we wanted to be successful.

**Number 8: Trust in our Policies and Process around DE**

We recognized that we had appropriate guiding principles and reasonable policies, but we needed a decentralized model for implementation. That required giving more authority to deans, directors, individual faculty, and staff. To be honest, the best ideas for moving wraparound services online came from the experts in the specific units.

**Number 7: Communication and information overload**

We struggled with communication of all types and at all levels of the organization. We added meetings, weekly email updates, webpages, and started using MS Teams, Zoom, Google Chat, Canvas, etc. We were not always successful and while we are now using more communication tools, initial survey results indicate that many feel more disconnected.

**Number 6: Importance of luck coupled with continuous assessment and improvement**

It is much easier to identify problems than it is to find solutions, so we need to start with realistic assessments.

Shameless ACCJC plug: By chance, a couple individuals at the college had concluded site visits at other institutions in early spring and initiated conversations about ways to quickly improve our professional development materials. Two weeks prior to the order to move operations online, we had the Canvas training material updated, so luck was on our side.
**Number 5: Importance of Patience – Patience with people and processes around DE**

“Opportunities lie in the places where people complain.” We had to develop a perspective grounded in the reality that consensus and closure take time, so you must be patient with people and processes. People need to know that they have been heard.

Many struggled with the limitations of online education. We ran into small pockets of ideological challenges related to online education, social proof as folks found comfort with peers, and operant conditioning as folks desperately wanted to just do what worked in the past. All this required great patience to help move the organization forward.

**Number 4: Importance of Teamwork**

We learned quickly that it’s about teamwork – no one does it alone.

You can’t demand confluence and immediately force people to come together. You bring your team together through your work ethic and use of truly consultative processes. As a result, our perspective has been sharpened and reinforced in terms of a collaborative approach to leadership.

**Number 3: Flexibility and regular quality assessments**

Flexibility was more important than absolute adherence to rigid policy and past practice. Most of the processes we developed were good, but the environment changed, so over time, we had to remind ourselves to assess and make updates where necessary.

**Number 2: Scarcity and opportunity costs in decision making**

Scarcity and loss aversion extended to things beyond toilet paper. In April we were all tying to purchase the same technology, equipment, and supplies.

We struggled with the juxtaposition between conservation and the feeling that we needed to make use of every available resource. Scarcity changes how opportunity costs and alternatives affect decision making.

**Number 1: Recognize and make room for twaddle and flaws of the human condition**

Recognize and account for twaddle – individuals and the media will at times makes things up versus admitting that they don’t know. Everyone struggles with uncertainty, so we had to account for the potential for misinformation.

This recognition was also a lesson in compassion. We learned that we needed to more frequently ask people how they are doing and make a commitment to fix the issues that are within our purview.