

STAYING CONNECTED IN A DISCONNECTED WORLD: SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN TRANSITION DURING COVID-19

Hong Dao Nguyen, Timothy Lee

Presenting Author: Hong Dao Nguyen (hongdao.nguyen@sydney.edu.au)
School of Life and Environmental Sciences, The University of Sydney, Sydney NSW 2006, Australia

KEYWORDS: online learning, transition, first-year student engagement, student support, COVID-19

In the current COVID-19 landscape, the shift to online partway through the semester for a large first-year biology unit was disorientating and isolating for many students. Learners were impacted by a myriad of factors including Zoom fatigue, access to quality internet, financial stress and mental health. Throughout the semester, we connected with students about how they felt they were tracking with their studies, support they needed to assist with their learning and their feedback on interventions implemented based on their responses from prior surveys. Consistency and flexibility with teaching approaches were key. Many students relied on keeping to their class timetables and live interaction with instructors to stay motivated, whilst others preferred to catch-up via recordings or online modules in their own time. We also organised regular Question & Answer sessions over Zoom to further facilitate live interactions between students and teachers. It was also challenging for the instructors to grow accustomed to teaching without relying on non-verbal communication cues from students. However, we came across pleasant discoveries from running online classes that we believe would also be useful approaches to implement in in-person classes to enhance engagement with learning in a large and diverse cohort.

Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, 30 September - 2 October 2020, page 61, ISBN Number 978-0-9871834-9-1.