

## ELEVATE INSTRUCTION TO AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

Heini SHI, PhD  
Professor of Practice in Management  
NYU Shanghai  
Shanghai, CHINA

Jace HARGIS, PhD  
Professor  
NYU Shanghai  
Shanghai, CHINA

### ABSTRACT

Providing online learning opportunities has been seen as a two-sided coin for decades. Some perceive an online learning environment as a suboptimal area for providing education. Others have seen online learning with potential for engaging students in authentic ways and capitalizing on the vast research in the area of informal settings. This paper shares key points to consider when migrating face-to-face courses online. In our situation, there were additional challenges of rapid time, stress, unknown expectations, and an uncertainty of how the material would be received, integrated and if the course would ever be offered in this format again. In an attempt to address a broad approach to teaching and learning online, we used the framework of ELEVATE, which represents Empathy, Learning Outcomes, Erudite, Value, Assessment, Technology and Emotion.

**Keywords:** Online, empathy, learning outcomes, erudite, value, assessment.

“Throughout time, humans have utilized different technological tools to enhance both basic communication and learning. For instance, humans have gone from cave drawings to web sites; from petroglyphs to blogging; from conversations to instant messaging; and from storytelling to e-books. As such, technology has played a key role in shaping how humans communicate and understand one another. While technology has cycled through novel methods of teaching and learning, so too does the learning process cycle through on an individual level. It is important to note the coinciding patterns of cycles, a larger global pattern within a recurring internal cycle of teaching and learning, which includes many of the philosophical orientations to learning. Therefore, we should be aware of the cycles and more effectively communicate to an audience that resembles a moving target (Hargis & Rakita, 2005, p. 309).”

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak has reached around the world, significantly affecting human lives and economies. National borders are closed and much of the world moves their interactions online, so do many education institutions. How will this pandemic change the world? How will we interact with each other in the future? Many of us are asking but nobody can predict.

Most likely we will be in a new normal and not return to the same style we used to live, including education.

Under the pandemic threat, online learning environments seem to be more of an option, although they are also critiqued for insufficient quality. Many of us have been teaching online for decades and realize that to create a high quality online learning experience requires time, resources and most of all attention to foundational effective course design models. The National Public Radio posted a recent article entitled "[Panic-gogy](#)", where the question was how do we teach in times of panic. Although there are several interesting points in this article notably that what most instructors are creating now is not actually online courses, due to the criteria mentioned above. However, it seems that the larger elephant in the room is that we have never applied the same criteria to traditional teaching. Whether teaching online, offline, abroad, informal, experiential, service, community, etc., effective teaching should attend to research-based instructional methods.

Ironically, one of the major "panic points" that quickly arises is how we assess, measure and evaluate student performance (many call this exams and grading). It appears that the first question for many instructors is how do I prevent my students from cheating if I "test" online? There are plenty of third party exam proctoring companies that have stepped in to solve this problem by offering an expensive method to live proctor using other people around the world to watch our students take exams. This opens our students up to privacy issues, additional stress, technology issues, and overall social equity issues. All of this in times of extraordinary stress and anxiety in the world and many times, the health and wellbeing of our students. For social scientists, we see this approach as a validity issue, where we are intentionally adding confounding variables while attempting to measure student performance and therefore chances of measuring intended outcomes are suspect. Rutgers University has created and shared a nice summary of [Alternatives to Proctored Exams](#), which suggest a series of low-stake formative assessment, such as quizzes, open-book take-home assessments, presentations, annotated bibliography, peer/self-review, e-Portfolio, and papers or projects. All of which are great ideas AND most have been part of foundational pedagogy for decades.

So, for educators to better prepare for a diverse and flexible workforce of tomorrow, we should reflect and be ready to revise and propose alternatives to some aspects of education which have not shown to be as effective over the years. Ideally, the new approach we propose here can help to prepare learners to reflect, struggle with, make sense of and apply information, to navigate in an unfamiliar, dynamic environment, adapt, and lead.

NYU Shanghai was among the first universities to migrate all teaching into an online environment when COVID-19 outbreaked in China in early 2020. Given the urgency, there was limited time for faculty members to prepare and transform their face-to-face (F2F) teaching material and methods. We have dedicated enormous efforts in the past two months to assist and provide support for the teaching and learning migration and would like to share our ideas with colleagues who may be in the middle of a new way of teaching and learning.

## **ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE**

Over time, many terms have been used to describe teaching and learning via an electronic medium contrasting with a physical F2F method. What is the perfect label to place on this type of learning? Online, digital, e-learning, mobile, virtual, distance, or some new term (or perhaps just teaching and learning, as format may not matter if we are attending to foundational course design). Or should we use other more open terms such as agile, innovative, blended, hybrid, flexible, or connectivism? Humans generally have diverse preferences for a variety of reasons, often due to our prior experiences.

These are all very important and complex questions which we do not have a definitive answer. The goal of this conversation is to share our experiences and not debate the

terminology of integrating appropriate, relevant and meaningful (ARM) technology into teaching. In the context of the current circumstances, given limitations we have realized, we will be pragmatic and operationally define our approach by choosing the term "online." We are not here as authorities, or to tell others what to call this concept, but believe at this time, this term has the potential of representing an inclusive, ubiquitous approach to meet our goal. Reflecting on how we have changed and perhaps not, we would like to share several of our recent experiences for the reader's consideration.

## **PRACTICE FROM OUR RECENT EXPERIENCES**

During the initial two week period that the university decided to migrate our courses online, the Director Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL), a co-author of this article, quickly created a functional, accessible support resource, entitled **Initial Considerations to Teaching Online**, meant to guide our rapid progression. The goal was to share clear steps for faculty who had not taught online (which were most as indicated by a pre-semester Self-Efficacy survey).

Only six weeks have passed since our first class taught online, and we are beginning to observe with growing satisfaction and an enhanced critical lens how our newly migrated instructional methods are advancing and connecting with our students in unanticipated ways. For example, several student perceptions shared their comments for learning online:

- "This [online] is better than sitting in class and the professor proving theorems."
- "Almost everything is better online. The lectures are very engaging and the recitations are also a great chance for us to communicate with other students."
- "Online learning allows more time for us to raise questions and digest the knowledge by listening to what we don't understand many times."
- "In a F2F course, I usually get confused but do not have the opportunity to think about it clearly. However, using the online format, I can review all the material afterward, and pause to take complete notes."

With this situational data and alignment with prior research, we propose an "ELEVATE" approach to teaching online to address the new challenges of learning and prepare our students for a "new [and potentially enhanced] normal" higher education.

Let's admit it, this is an extremely challenging time for everyone, emotionally, physically and cognitively. As instructors, many of us try to convey a positive message, both previously in our classes and perhaps even more imperative now amid COVID-19 anguish. We suggest that we consider organizing our instructional approach into corresponding categories, which aligns with ELEVATE:

**Empathy**

**Learning Outcomes**

**Erudite**

**Value**

**Assessment**

**Technology**

**Emotion [and Enjoy]**

**Empathy**

Empathy is an essential human quality which becomes particularly pivotal in the current crisis environment. We are more mindful than ever when we interact with students whom

sometimes we have not even met and who are stressed and anxious for academic performance and/or family matters.

In an unprecedented pandemic, one educator's heart, passion and dedication are essential, perhaps as much as effective pedagogy. As learning experiences go online, we often assume that all the students are perfectly connected (with technology as well as physically, emotionally, etc.). The reality is that many still do not have stable internet connections, a social phenomenon that is called digital divide or digital gap. The [Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development \(OECD\)](#) definition of the "digital divide" is the gaps in access to information and communication technology (ICT) - threatens the ICT "have-nots", whether individuals, groups or entire countries. Some of our students are located in developing countries or rural areas (sometimes even at student's residence halls) where the connection is not stable or nonexistent. Instructors should be aware of these differences and gaps and be a role model of social empathy. It might be easy to say but not so automatic for those who have never experienced to truly understand the needs of the have nots.

As the news channels are filled with live updates of the pandemic outbreak, we are all overwhelmed by unprecedented negative information about death toll and potential economic and social impact. Given the emergency in China in late January our students enrolled in our universities other global campuses and centers with short notice. Only one month later most of the students had to move again because, as many other cities around the world, our New York City campus and some global centers were also closing down. For undergraduate students who have moved several times in such a short time, these clearly are challenging situations. Nevertheless, we are delighted to observe that most of our students have demonstrated remarkable abilities to quickly adapt to the changes. Some of them travelled a long way to return home on another continent, while others decided to stay with their relatives/friends, sometimes because the borders of their own countries are closed. We believe that all these circumstances should be taken into consideration while teaching - there are things, such as physical health and psychological stability, far more important than quizzes and our usual teaching routing. Understanding and empathy towards their situations (and our own) are critical to achieve educational goals.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Ideally, Learning Outcomes should not change, as most likely they have been approved by a curriculum committee and represent attainable attributes of the learner after course completion. Actually, whether we are teaching F2F, online, blended, hybrid, abroad, etc., the LOs for our courses should not vary significantly. Once we have prepared well-aligned, effective LOs, we can offer appropriate ways to Assess and create Instructional Methods to facilitate the LOs. We might want to check that our LOs are still aligned with Program Outcomes, Assessments and Teaching Methods.

Recall that Learning Outcomes (LO) are what learners will **KNOW** (Cognitive); **DO** (Psychomotor Skill); and **VALUE** (Affective Disposition) as they progress through the course. Outcomes should be specific, speak to skills and performance rather than knowledge and understanding. Outcomes should be measurable and use [action verbs](#).

There is ample research that student engagement is key to active learning and this benefits all students, regardless of their background, motivation and abilities. Thus, we should consider offering active methods with opportunities to give and solicit student feedback, which can help us gauge when approaches are effective. Creating active, meaningful teaching methods may be the most significantly modified aspect of migrating courses online. You may wish to review the [280 Active Teaching Strategies](#) list, which many can be adapted to online. If you simply open an online [Discussion Board](#), chances are few students will contribute (Washington, et al. 2019). Whereas if you integrate a Discussion into an assignment and/or interactive lecture, with higher level prompts ([Bloom's Taxonomy](#) of prompts) that provide clear directions and explanations connecting the students' thoughts and the material, there is a much greater chance that the activity will be productive. This approach can be supported by [interleaving](#) assessment and outcomes.

## **Erudite**

An erudite person has both deep and broad familiarity with general subjects and is usually knowledgeable in a particular subject, by virtue of study and extensive reading of the subject's literature. By going virtual the medium of communication, knowledge sharing and transferring has significantly changed. The opening statement of this paper described the phenomenon of electracy, which is a fusion of the oral and literate modes of teaching and learning. Communicating through electronic means has an effect on the structure and content of that information.

**"The electracy mode has the potential to be anonymous, and yet also assert the authority of authorship. It can be, and often is, linear and hierarchical, but it also has the potential to be fluid. It is at once immediate, and yet distant; ephemeral and concrete. Because of its electronic nature it is eminently variable, and yet, it can be archived, and thereby achieve permanency (Hargis & Rakita, 2005, p. 311)."**

Therefore, being open to learning and integrating new modes of electronic communication is an essential aspect of meaningful, sustained online education.

## **Value**

Value here is understood both as a noun and a verb. As a verb, in the new virtual environment we ought to value the students' as partners by addressing their feedback quickly and making adjustments when necessary. It is new territory for many of us and we believe that echoing students' learning needs can help us to gain awareness and revise some aspects of our teaching which perhaps in a different communication channel (such as F2F) would not be an issue. Because of the new virtual medium, instructors may convey messages differently as a monologue in front of a computer, and these messages can be also interpreted and comprehended by the students who are most likely sitting at home and not necessarily having the same level of concentration that he/she normally would have in the classroom.

As a noun, value reflects its social and economic connotation that entails the value of the knowledge, of partnership, team work, and solidarity. We hope the students embrace the intangible value of the knowledge and appreciate the human value in challenging times like this one. The efforts of us and of the students have done. Ownership (by students so it's not my course, but "Our" course). Perhaps there should be more of a networking mindset for everyone. Students are in a team so they may need to ask, check and share with peers.

## **Assess**

We have an opportunity to capitalize on students' access to the internet as we identify appropriate ways to capture student behaviors and abilities. Since we may not be able to detect student physical cues of understanding, offering more frequent feedback opportunities are beneficial. A timely feedback loop will help students gauge their progress and provide the instructor with information to identify next steps or remediation. Not all feedback requires grading, some may simply offer individual or aggregate narratives of trends that the instructor is observing. We should be clear with expectations and rubrics, perhaps include examples and models. You may wish to consider offering [Student Response Systems \(Iwamoto & Hargis, 2018\)](#) such as [Poll Everywhere](#), [Kahoot](#), [Answer Garden](#), [Tricider](#) or [Padlet](#).

We should continue to focus on developing reliable and valid ways to judge student performance. We also need to create a transparent and consistent [measurement tool \(analytical rubric\)](#), to be able to evaluate the level of quality. Recall there are many ways to assess, including [Projects](#), [Artifacts](#), [Paper](#), [Performance](#), [Presentations](#), [Reflections](#), [Practical](#), [Peer Evaluations](#), etc., all can be created, gathered and assessed using technology.

## **Technology (Appropriate, Relevant and Meaningful, ARM)**

Many have been identifying and using appropriate, relevant and meaningful (ARM) technology over the years. These approaches should remain the same, along with the basic consideration for integrating technology:

1. Use tools that you already know. The challenge becomes how best to align these tools with the specific type of experiences that engage students.
2. Use ubiquitous tools, especially ones that you and students currently use (i.e., institutional Google Suite).
3. Use institutionally supported tools, such as your Course Management Systems (CMS) and programs that are part of those systems - try not to let those systems modify your teaching philosophy, outcomes or get between you and your students.

There are many ways to use tech to create online learning opportunities and afford students authentic ways to represent their application of concepts. I will share a few, which you might consider, realizing we all have different approaches, expectations and experience using technology. If you are unable to find precisely the tech tool through institutional paths that can help you create a similar engaging environment as you typically offer students, the following approaches might be worth exploring. Remember, these technologies could be used by you and/or students to create the type of opportunities that you believe are appropriate.

Ruben Puentedura (2012) derived the SAMR model (Hargis, Cavanaugh, Kamali & Soto, 2013) for integrating technology, which we are currently seeing in action. The model includes:

- Substitution where technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with no functional change; Augmentation, as technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with functional improvement; Modification where technology allows for significant task redesign; and Redefinition, technology allows for the creation of new tasks, previously inconceivable.

Some of the early data includes creative use of relevant technology to create an inclusive, accessible online learning environment. We have seen our faculty use technology tools such as Zoom (with break-out, whiteboard, chat, and discussions), GoFormative, Google Documents and Slides, Flipgrid, WeChat, Padlet, Kahoot, Quizlet, e-Whiteboards, Poll Everywhere, Slack, Jamboard and Discord (free LMS accessible in China without a VPN). Faculty are integrating online approaches such as real-time (synchronous) discussions, shared lecture presentations, virtual office hours, Project-Based collaboration (Iwamoto & Hargis, 2016), video screencasts, student-created video or audio products, synchronous lecture videos, audio files of course content and much less, online proctored exams.

### **Videos**

- Screencasting (Apps such as ShowMe [free]; Websites/plugins such as Jing; Google Screencastify, Zoom, Screencast-o-matic; Nimbus, or on a MAC you can use QuickTime player). Screencast can be powerful tools for instructors AND students as they capture any activity displayed on a computer screen with voice over.
- Video Scribe. This is another way to share material in a fashion that allows you to create engaging visuals and help students focus on key concepts. One of the major advantages is that at the end, the video automatically zooms out and displays the entire conceptual framework. This is particularly helpful for students who may only be able to understand facts in isolation. They offer a one-week free trial.
- Stop Motion. If you would like to demonstrate a dimensional object, this program will allow you to do that. The program allows you to show your object, move it around, take another picture and narrate. The software threads the pictures and voices together.

- **Green Screen.** These require resources, time and a storyboard or script. They can be a powerful addition for key concepts.
- **Flipgrid.** A quick way for instructors and students to create and connect videos.

### **Presentation Programs**

- **Google Slides** used in combination with other tech such as screencasts.
- **Pecha Kucha** creates a visual presentation of images with voice over.
- **Prezi** for animated, non-linear presentations.
- **Canva** for creative presentations.

**Student Response Systems** such as Poll Everywhere, Kahoot, Answer Garden, Tricider or Padlet can be used a/synchronous to maintain attention; promote engagement; help facilitate discussion; encourage participation; create a safe, accessible space; and check for understanding.

### **Emotion [and Enjoy]**

Every activity requires a certain endurance and you may be in excellent shape to lecture for 3-4 hours each day but teaching online requires a different skill set and timeframe. Pace yourself, develop efficiency models, reach out for assistance often and find the balance. Remember, we need to stay healthy to function at our best, so eat, rest, exercise, all of the normal recommendations, but often, these are delayed when we teach online, especially if we are teaching students from different time zones. Above all, try to enjoy the new challenges. Your attitude will be completely transparent and modeled by our students.

Research on effective educators include several attributes, some being enthusiasm, care and humanism. In Goleman's (1998) work on Social Emotional Intelligence (SEI), he outlined five key components of a people who possess SEI,

1. **Self-awareness** – ability to know one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values and recognize impact while using feelings to guide decisions.
2. **Self-regulation** – controlling one's disruptive emotions & impulses, adapting to changing circumstances.
3. **Social skill** – managing relationships to move people
4. **Empathy** – considering other people's feelings
5. **Motivation** – driven to achieve for the sake of achievement

Durlak et al. (2011) found several reasons why SEI is important:

1. **Increases prosocial behaviors** (collaborate, empathy)
2. **Improves achievement, engagement**
3. **Understand perspectives of others, relate**
4. **Make sound choices on social decisions**
5. **Decrease emotional distress**
6. **Increase readiness, success, work relationships, mental health, engaged citizenship**

All of these attributes should remain in our teaching toolbox and perhaps be heightened during these times of dramatic and escalating changes. Our students may be looking for stability in our courses, and if possible, we should try to offer as much as we can.

### **REFERENCES**

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K.B. (2011). "The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions." *Child Development*, 82, 405-432.

**Goleman, D. (1998). Working with emotional intelligence. New York: Bantam Books.**

**Hargis, J., & Rakita, G. (2005). The more we change, the more we remain the same: Electracy model of teaching. International Journal of Learning, 11, 309-314.**

**Hargis, J., Cavanaugh, C., Kamali, T., & Soto, M. (2013). Measuring the difficult to measure: iPad mobile learning. International Journal of Mobile Learning, 5(2), 60-77.**

**Iwamoto, D., & Hargis, J. (2018). Student Response Systems: A Mindful Approach. In R. Obeid, A. Schartz, C. Shane-Simpson, & P. J. Brooks (Eds.) The impact technology has on how instructors teach and how students learn. Society for the Teaching of Psychology.**

**Iwamoto, D., Hargis, J., & Vuong, K. (2016). Effect of Project-Based Learning pedagogical model on achievement through the evaluative lens of student perceptions. International Journal for the Scholarship of Technology Enhanced Learning, 1(1), 24-42.**

**Puentedura, R. (2012). Building on the SAMR model. Unpublished essay.**

**Washington, T., Bardolph, M., Hadjipieris, P., Ghanbari, S., & Hargis, J. (2019). Discussion Boards: The good, bad and the ugly. The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education, 9(3).**

#### **BIO-DATA AND CONTACT ADDRESSES OF AUTHORS**



**Heini SHI, PhD Professor of Practice in Management, NYU Shanghai**  
Heini Shi is a Professor of Practice in Management at NYU Shanghai. Dr. Shi has global policy and business experience in over 40 countries where she directed complex project implementation, created public-private partnerships, and advised market expansion strategies. Shi has developed leadership programs and taught at leading business schools in Europe, China, and the United States. Prior to employment in China, Shi worked in Europe and the United States as Program Manager at the World Bank, United Nations Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where she designed and managed economic policy and social development projects. She was also a legal advisor to the multinational law firm Allen & Overy, consulting with European firms on their Chinese investments.



**Jace H ARGIS, PhD Professor, NYU Shanghai**  
Dr. Jace HARGIS is currently a Professor and Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at NYU Shanghai. His prior positions include a CTL Director at the University of California; a Professor and Associate Provost in Hawaii; a College Director in Abu Dhabi, UAE; an Associate Professor and Assistant Provost in northern California; and an Assistant Professor and Director of Faculty Development in Florida. He has authored a textbook, an anthology and published over 150 academic articles as well as offered hundreds of academic presentations. He has earned a BS in Oceanography from Florida Institute of Technology; an MS in Environmental Engineering Sciences and a PhD in Science Education from the University of Florida. Dr. Hargis' research focuses on how people learn while integrating appropriate, relevant and meaningful instructional technologies.