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### **How to Learn and Lead from a Place of Hope**

<https://www.aacu.org/blog>

Jul 16, 2020

Denise J. Larsen

Are *hope* and *education* synonymous? It’s a common assumption, to be sure, as educators often tacitly seek to imbue hope in their students. But what does it mean to learn and lead from a place of hope during these exceedingly uncertain times?

Of the many academic and operational definitions of hope, my favorite is that hope is saying “yes” to life. Hope is a choice. It is a commitment to envisioning a future in which we wish to participate. The choice isn’t always easy, but that decision to say “yes” to life is all the more important when times are tough.

Hope is fundamental to learning and to living. Hope recruits the imagination, giving us temporary respite from the difficult present while we consider how things might be made different. Research tells us that, particularly during periods of uncertainty, hope tilts us toward action and toward engaging with life—even as we remain uncertain about what will happen next.

At [Hope Studies](#) at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, we have spent the last 27 years learning about what it means to learn and lead from a place of hope. We know that hope is multifaceted. We know that hope is unique to each of us—my hope is not yours. We also know that hope is important across many cultures, faiths, and languages. So while we work across differences, there are also many commonalities to fostering hope. Our work has focused specifically on what it means to be intentional and, often, explicit about hope in the classroom, the boardroom, and the hospital room.

Below, I share some of our discoveries with you—an offering in the spirit of hope, and an invitation to experiment with and learn about hope during times when it is most needed.

- Hope is not Pollyanna. Hope and reality can coexist. Hope does not deny the gravity of the situation. It lives alongside circumstances, inviting us to seek even the tiniest glimmer of possibility.

- Hope is a search behavior. Become mindful about hope. Take note of where hope appears for you. Sometimes a walk, a commitment to notice hope, and a camera are just what's needed.
- Relationships, like those between teachers and students, can be profound sources of hope. Knowing that someone sees us as valuable and believes in us is powerful medicine.
- Ask others about their hopes. Listen without correcting. Be present. This is a gift of hope in itself.
- Our values are an anchor. When we are uncertain of just what difference we can make, we have the fundamental choice to be the kind of people we hope to be in this circumstance.
- The hope of leaders and the hope of learners are important. The practices we use for fostering others' hope work on us, too.
- Hope is most commonly pro-social and action-oriented. We hold many hopes for others. Reflecting on these hopes and explicitly sharing them can seed community building. We may hear ourselves saying, "I share your hope."
- To make meaningful change, it is not necessary for everyone to share all hopes. It is okay to acknowledge the hopes that we do not share.
- Hope is both a process and an outcome. Our hopes can and do change over time. This is part of developing and growing. As we learn more about the world and ourselves, our hopes change. This process of learning and growing itself can offer hope.

*Denise J. Larsen is director Hope Studies at the University of Alberta.*

## Can You Teach a 'Transformative' Humanities Course Online?

**It's time to approach online teaching, not from a deficit mentality, but from an openness to its potential**

*By Lee Skallerup Bessette* JULY 09, 2020

[https://www.chronicle.com/article/Can-You-Teach-a/249152?cid=wcontentgrid\\_hp\\_9](https://www.chronicle.com/article/Can-You-Teach-a/249152?cid=wcontentgrid_hp_9)

It's a question I keep seeing in faculty conversations on Twitter and elsewhere: *Where are the examples of transformative online classes in the humanities?* Academe has moved from the [pedagogical triage](#) of the spring into [planning](#) a more robust online experience for the fall. Now we're all looking for guidance and inspiration as we rush to redesign entire courses into some form of online or hybrid format.

Gone are the desks rearranged into circles for Socratic discussions about literature, debates about historical events, critiques of one another's writing. Gone is the face-to-face intimacy of humanities education in its best, purest, most ideal form. Are we stuck fruitlessly trying to replicate that on Zoom?

The stress of the spring semester left many faculty members ([and most students](#)) ready to throw the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to online courses. But remember: What you did in haste last March was not online learning — it was [emergency distance learning](#), forced on you by a pandemic. As you prepare for the fall, it is your responsibility to resist defeatist narratives and approach online teaching, not from a deficit mentality, but from an openness to its potential. Because — done well — online pedagogy *does* offer a form of intimacy and intensity, and even a “transformative” experience.

The American sociologist [Jack Mezirow](#) defined transformative learning as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference.” That quality in a course is difficult to measure, but it is the kind of course that every humanities professor hopes to teach at some point.

Just because you rarely look to the online realm for examples of transformative humanities courses doesn't mean they don't exist. They do. But four entrenched inequities have kept academe from valuing such courses. Among them:

- The second-class status of pedagogy research. In academe, you may be a great teacher, in person or online, but it is your disciplinary research that counts the most for your career. You are meant to write about your field, not about your teaching in that field. For early-career academics looking for tenure-track jobs and then tenure, there is zero motivation to write about pedagogy. That kind of writing, when it does happen, is often lost on personal blogs with limited impact.
- The third-class status of online courses. Until this year, most faculty members resisted teaching online. Particularly in the humanities, the attitude was, and remains, that it was something to be avoided at all costs. Online courses were, at best, a way to offer cheap gen-ed courses over the summer, and, at worst, part of the neoliberal agenda to defund the humanities and standardize the curriculum toward tenure-destroying ends. Given that general hostility, who

would write about a positive experience of teaching online? How many departments celebrate excellence in online teaching?

- The fourth-class status of online-oriented institutions. The most robust online offerings are found at community colleges and regional state universities. They have embraced online education because it's what their student demographic wants and needs, but those campuses aren't the ones we typically look to for leadership in the humanities. We disregard their experience and expertise because of their perceived lack of status. Their perspective is silenced, as well, by a relative lack of resources: Shrinking state budgets and heavy teaching loads leave their faculty members with limited time to contribute to research and discourse on online education.
- The fifth-class status of the majority of online instructors. While funding cuts make faculty work more and more precarious, and tenured professors turn up their noses at teaching online, it is mostly contingent instructors who teach online and do it well. And when would they have time to write about their classroom expertise? Most are balancing multiple low-paying jobs while trying to secure more-permanent positions. What financial support is there for adjuncts to create a robust research project studying the impact of online pedagogy on student learning? On many campuses, they are not eligible for teaching grants, awards, or resources.

Of course you can find exceptions — tenured professors who enjoy online teaching, departments that value pedagogical research, top-tier institutions with robust online offerings. But those successes are few and far between. And so far, they have not diminished the larger systemic barriers that keep our best online instructors from widely sharing their amazing humanities courses.

Of the few online humanities courses that are celebrated, most are highly collaborative projects, devised not just by a single faculty member but by a team that also includes, perhaps, an instructional designer, a tech expert, and a teaching assistant. That's not to say you can't develop a transformative online course on your own — just that it isn't easy or obvious. How many campuses have enough tech experts to aid every instructor for every course?

Another hurdle is the lack of research on the quality of online courses. Most scholarship on remote education focuses on the quantitative over the qualitative — big data and tracking trends. Such large-scale, quantitative studies often aren't looking into, nor could they even hope to measure, whether online courses are “transformative” (or not). As a result, most published studies or examples of online pedagogy aren't what most humanists are seeking in designing their own courses.

Keep in mind, too, that most online courses are not transformative experiences. But neither are most courses taught in face-to-face classrooms. On any campus, you can find in-person classes that are good, bad, or transformative. To expect every online course to be either transformative or not worth your attention is an unrealistic standard that academe doesn't impose on traditional classes.

And yet, despite all the resistance to recognizing transformative online courses in the humanities, they do exist. I want to share four examples of online courses that students say have had a major impact on their education and lives.

- “European Women’s History.” This [award-winning course](#) was developed by Danielle Kinsey, an assistant professor of history at Carleton University, who she has been teaching it for four years. Designed for maximum engagement, Kinsey uses a mixture of short videos, small-group discussion boards, and evocative weekly topics and visuals.
- “Mythology and Folklore” and “Epics of Ancient India.” Both courses, developed and taught by Laura Gibbs, an online instructor at the University of Oklahoma, use the same structure and approach, with the only difference being the readings assigned. Gibbs has been teaching online for 18 years, [uses blogs](#) and [creative storytelling](#) to engage students, and even [practices ungrading](#). The students connect with one another through their blogs, creating community through their writing.
- “Writing I/Writing II.” Deanna Mascle, an English instructor and director of a writing program at Morehead State University, has also been teaching online for more than a decade, and she has recently started [teaching writing through games](#). She gives students choice in their work, focuses on iteration and revision, and has them engage with one another through their writing. [She also uses a tool called Hyperdocs](#) to create asynchronous activities.
- “The Language and Culture of Quebec.” This is my own course, about which I [have written](#) before, and I include it here because students have responded to it so well. The course has no synchronous component, but it [helps students connect](#) what they are learning about Quebec to their own lives and creates multiple ways to engage with the content.

The only reason I know about those other courses is my [professional network](#) on Twitter. I have been exposed to a number of inspiring online teachers and their courses because of my social-media presence. But I know that’s not true for everyone, and there are still too many of us who have never experienced transformative online learning and, thus, actively resist embracing its possibilities.

To that end, I am working with the Modern Languages Association [to find ways](#) to identify, feature, and share the great courses and experience of humanities instructors across institutional and faculty affiliations. Let us break the stigma of teaching the humanities online, and celebrate those who have long done it well but have remained invisible because of the various structures that have not valued their contributions. (If you would like your course to be featured on the MLA site, please email [makingthecourse@hcommons.org](mailto:makingthecourse@hcommons.org). Even better, nominate courses taught by Black, Indigenous, and other faculty members of color.)

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**MLA Modern Languages Association Online Course Showcase 2020-2021 10:00**

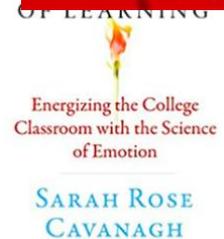
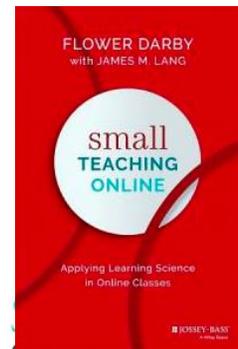
- Describe important considerations for online learning.
- Plan your online course structure.
- Build your course content into the Learning Management System (LMS).
- Adhere to accessibility guidelines when developing your course.
- Facilitate your course successfully online.

Register <https://join.hcommons.org> support you and your students.

**Online Course Design Experience with Colby & Bates Colleges**

*Bowdoin Lead Facilitators: Katie Byrnes & Irina Popescu*

**Resources at:** <https://www.colby.edu/learning/online-course-design/>



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