

The Brighter Side of the Global Pandemic

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This global pandemic has shown us the brighter side of learning experiences. Senecans are investing time and energy to support our communities by sewing polka dot caps for our frontline workers and donating PPE to local hospitals. Artists and musicians are taking their shows online to share their talents and joy during these trying times. Professors are embracing innovation and creativity to provide great online learning experiences for our students at Seneca. It is the story of coming together amid social distancing and inspiring each other.

COVID-19 symbolizes a change in teaching from an in-class lecture-listen model to an interactive online learn-by-doing model. Early spring, our classroom walls dissolved to give way to Blackboard Collaborate, BigBlueButton, Microsoft Teams, and other collaborative online tools to connect and enhance student learning at Seneca. Technological evolution such as online banking, virtual visits to doctors, and (dare I say) online travel booking has provided stellar frictionless customer experiences, removing many inconveniences in the customer's journey. It is our turn to transform academia and unleash the positive impacts of technology by teaching our students in virtual classrooms on a college-wide massive scale.

Navigating this paradigm shift from classroom to online teaching has presented numerous challenges – but nothing that my fellow colleagues cannot handle. The key success factors are to couple the “can do” enthusiasm with the right training. We are grateful to leverage the training options offered by the Teaching & Learning Centre. This helped overcome the steep learning curve in integrating pre-recorded video lessons through Loom or Screencast-O-Matic, opening more communication channels with students, and adapting to the agile delivery of online material. Our administration and support teams have played a pivotal role in supporting faculty members and transitioning all the services online. You have our heartfelt thanks!

Switching from brick to click model is a challenging proposition for faculty and students alike. However, there are the prospects of creating connected, interactive, and engaging

learning communities that inspire dialogue and deep thinking. Reassurances and prompt responses to student queries go a long way in alleviating student anxiety and making them feel supported. After all, our students have embraced the “Challenge Accepted” motto and we are with them every step of the way!

There are always upsides during downtimes and, as our SWOT Analysis would indicate, there are always opportunities to capitalize on and combat the threats. This pandemic has presented many opportunities on the personal side:

Time factor

Suddenly, COVID-19 cleared off our social calendars – no more going to gyms, restaurants, movie theatres, concerts, birthdays, haircuts (remember President Agnew and Yanni!), and all other engagements. We get this gift of time to do other things, important things, or nothing at all – which I know is rare as you are all rushing to record your next video lecture!

Catch up with family and loved ones

This lockdown provides us with opportunities to strengthen our social bonds with family members and loved ones. I am sure your children are enjoying your presence and full attention. Let’s not forget all those home-cooked meals (except that I am responsible for cooking those meals!) and good old family time!

Stronger communities

Adversities bring us all together and make us stronger. It is heart-warming to read stories like the Seneca professor spreading kindness, the Aviation professor transporting much-needed masks from China, and the Seneca graduates fundraising as a family for PPE. We are all in this together – we will come out stronger.

Global-level

We are breathing clean air – pollution and greenhouse gases have fallen dramatically around the world as we all stay in government-issued lockdowns or self-isolation. We are hopeful that this change is in the right direction to combat the climate change effects.

Embracing disruption and change has given us the opportunity to experience new adventures

right at home, master new skills, and develop qualities such as resilience, optimism, courage, and persistence. Most of all, it has given us the opportunity to be hopeful for more beautiful and brighter days ahead. I came across this beautiful quote today by Vivian Greene (author, artist, and entrepreneur): “Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass; it's about learning how to dance in the rain.”

View the [June 2020 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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