

Innovation & Adaptation

FACULTY, STUDENTS FORGE NEW PATH TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS DURING PANDEMIC

There's been a lot of talk about "thinking outside the box" over the past year as leaders from nearly every industry scrambled to adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At Divine Word College, administrators worked tirelessly to evaluate the school's ever-changing risk and determine the safest way to ensure the continuity of students' educations. As positive cases of the virus popped up, the college switched to virtual learning for short periods of time until it was deemed safe to return to the classrooms again.

Through these unpredictable times, many instructors and students have managed to embrace the uncertainty, break the mold and find innovative ways to teach and learn, no matter what the format.

VIDEOS BLEND VOICES

Dr. Evelyn Dias is an assistant professor of music and the liturgical music coordinator at DWC. She said in her opinion, this is no time for hesitancy when it comes to new technologies and teaching methods.

In the past year, Dr. Evelyn taught herself the basics of video production in order to safely share musical performances from a distance. She even made her own green screen from sheets of paper and green tape, thanks to the guidance provided on YouTube tutorials. It allowed her to record students singing or playing instruments one at a time in front of the background. Then she used software to digitally combine the audio, create a virtual background and unite the video images of the students.

"We were all bombarded with so many videos of people singing together on Zoom with the grid boxes and I thought, that's nice but it's kind of unnatural. So I wanted to put them together in a more organic way," Dr. Evelyn said.

The results are music videos that can be shared via social media, YouTube and at school Masses, since on-site singing has been prohibited for several months.

"Every single video taught me more and more, upping something I already knew," Dr. Evelyn said.

VIRTUAL LEARNING REQUIRES NEW SKILLS

For online classes, Dr. Evelyn started making short videos of herself explaining the basic concepts for daily lessons. She posts the videos early so students can watch them prior to the virtual class. Dr. Evelyn said she quickly noticed that her students were asking far fewer questions during class. For those who are not native English speakers, she said it's an opportunity to listen to the explanation more than once, slow it down, or stop the video and research unfamiliar words. "To make a video is so much work, so I have to be really deliberate and very clear about what exactly I want them to learn, how exactly I want them to visually see it and which words I choose so that there is no wasted time," she said.

"It's a lot of work but then you really have something concrete to show for it and you can use it again."

In fact, Dr. Evelyn said she plans to continue using the videos even after classes return to the regular face-to-face format. DWC Senior Frt. Joao Pinda Neto, SVD said he didn't know much about the video conferencing site Zoom before the pandemic, but he's used it so

much during virtual learning that he's practically an expert these days. Even after leaving DWC, Frt. Joao said he thinks he and his classmates will benefit from their proficiency with video conferencing services. The thing that impresses him most about online classes is the way students are able to perform group presentations, taking turns as they speak. "It is so fascinating that two or three students can present on the same topic but in different places at the same time," he said.

TUTORING MODIFIED FOR SAFETY

The Intensive English Language Institute (IELI) at DWC adapted its tutoring program during the second half of the spring 2020 semester. Traditionally, local tutor volunteers would meet on campus with ESL students to help them learn the language and culture.

In order to protect students and tutors from COVID-19, the program was reimaged. Faculty enlisted new tutors who could meet with students exclusively online for now, though they hope to invite the former tutors back as soon as it's

