

FACT2 Online Symposium:

Responding in real-time at SUNY to a global crisis

Managing the COVID-19 Crisis in the Spring and Planning for Fall

Confronted with a worldwide pandemic mid-way through the academic year, the State University of New York (SUNY) community responded by quickly pivoting to remote learning and student services. Each Spring, the SUNY FACT2 Council and SUNY Center for Professional Development host the Conference on Instructional Technology (CIT). CIT brings together SUNY faculty and instructional support professionals along with campus leaders in online learning and academic innovation. In place of the CIT face to face event and in light of the pandemic, FACT2 designed a special online symposium that allowed this community to critically examine the many complex challenges and decisions that comprised the response, look ahead at what we learned from the process, and discuss how this experience is changing higher-education. Held on May 28th, the Symposium brought together a broader audience than traditionally found at CIT, showing our collective need to connect with one another in a shared experience of reflection and preparation as the most unusual semester came to a close. The FACT2 Symposium allowed for sharing of both success stories and those of struggles and failure and explored what we learned from both. The goals of this event are found in the guiding questions below; participants learned:

- How SUNY transitioned to remote learning and how did it work?
- What was the impact of policy and process in managing the crisis
- What have faculty and instructional support teams learned about remote learning from those who adapted their courses?
- What has been the social impact on our faculty, staff, and students?
- How has remote learning had an impact on the student and faculty campus experience?

This Symposium explored how necessity fostered innovation in teaching and learning and allowed attendees to contribute to the conversation as SUNY, collectively looks ahead to Fall and beyond.

Agenda

The Symposium Agenda was designed by a small planning committee made up of representatives from FACT2, SUNY CPD, and the Provost's Office at System Administration . The day was structured to ensure a mixture of campus and system perspectives. Each broad topic area offered a collaboration, co-presenters included a team of Campus Professionals and a SUNY System Administration leader.

SUNY's Provost Tod Laursen opened the event followed by Austin Ostro, President of SUNY's Student Assembly, offering a broad overview of the current context facing higher education. The Symposium examined the SUNY's COVID response and planning in the areas of:

- Student Affairs and University Life
- Online and Distance Learning
- Information Technology
- Faculty Perspectives from SUNY University Faculty Senate and the SUNY Faculty Council of Community Colleges

Participants also heard directly from Faculty who shared stories of struggle and innovation as they pivoted from face to face to a remote teaching and learning environment and worked directly with students to meet their needs.

Networking and sharing of best practices as a form of professional development is important to the CIT Community, and there are high levels of engagement at every annual CIT event. To give participants the opportunity to provide input, insights, and share their concerns and collective burdens, the day incorporated the use of small breakout sessions. These sessions, organized around each of the themes noted above, were facilitated by leaders in each area and participants were eager to offer their voices to plans moving forward to fulfilling summer obligations and reopening in the Fall.

Statistics

This symposium was delivered live online via the Zoom web-conferencing platform and implemented by the SUNY Center for Professional Development, the SUNY support organization of FACT2 Council. A total of 536 people registered for the event and 379 unique participants attended in the live event. Breakout room participation was also well attended and allowed for lively discussion.

- Student Experience, Life and Wellness in Remote Learning – 66
- Evolving Models for Online/Remote Learning Fall 2020 - 108
- Faculty Experience, Development & Support - 61
- Experience, Infrastructure – 30

Detailed notes from the all sessions including the breakouts can be found linked to the “Resources” tab on <http://www.suny.edu/fact2symposium>

Transforming Experience into Practice: Key Takeaways

Working towards a Fall reopening plan, it was acknowledged that **preparing our on-campus spaces, both lab and classroom environments**, will be difficult as technology set-up and implementation, accounting for accessibility and closed captioning, and quality of audio broadcasts and recordings deserve special attention and resources. Likewise, software (e.g. Adobe products) normally served out in campus lab environments will be needed for home use by students for remote learning. There was also discussion of the current SUNY LMS and the possibility of procuring a new system in the next 2 years. Participants voiced concerns over our students being able to **access Internet Services/WiFi**; SUNY is working to provide this to students that are rural or cannot afford adequate technologies for learning. Technology solutions also must be enabled for student and faculty business services. In the Spring 2020 semester the moving of paper documents was only converted to email, making conducting campus business very challenging. Moving forward, **SUNY must work to develop digital workflows especially for campus services.**

The Symposium highlighted the incredible amounts of **faculty development** that occurred this past Spring to support faculty’s pivot to the online environment. SUNY System provided instructional design support and training which was used to fulfill or supplement on-campus resources. It was expressed that many had a positive experience. Although there are still those with technology struggles and

discipline-specific needs there continues an vast amount of resource sharing throughout the SUNY community. Moving toward the Fall, there was an expressed need for **technical training** beyond the use of the Blackboard CMS to include the use of 3rd party tools to enhance teaching. It was mentioned that savings in travel should be reinvested into faculty development.

Models of remote and online learning will need to evolve as SUNY moves toward the summer and next academic year. **Synchronous tools** will continue to be used and SUNY campuses have chosen tools based upon individual campus needs and budgets. However, there was also discussion about how **asynchronous teaching methods offer greater flexibility** for students. Concerns over proctoring tools continue as participants discussed what is being used throughout SUNY. **Alternative assessment** methods can be done in the online space and aligns to the new FACT2 Task Group on assessment being launched this summer. Labor-based grading contracts were also discussed as an opportunity for exploring more widely within SUNY. Campuses discussed the necessity of plans to include multiple scenarios and address a mix of online and on campus options. **Blended, Synchronous, Asynchronous, the HyFlex model, and flipped classroom models** were discussed within the breakout room for evolving models. Questions also arose as to how classes designed for face to face **large classrooms** can transfer to an online environment? **Field experience and applied learning** need to be redesigned during the age of COVID. Finally, **collaborative teaching models** are also being embraced as a way to use SUNY resources most effectively to meet student needs. Faculty are truly driving online learning in the age of COVID and must know how to accomplish what they need with the many tools and technologies now available to them.

One of the most powerful breakout sessions during the FACT2 Symposium included current **SUNY students** sharing their experiences and passion for how SUNY has responded during this pandemic. It was a good reminder as to the **social and emotional nature of learning** that happens in our classrooms and on campus. When students went remote half-way through the semester, it was those established **relationships with their faculty** that made a difference in persistence, clarity of goals and the worth of their education. The students remind us that personal connections matter. SUNY was able to quickly rethink and be flexible for their students. Student helpdesks, drop-in clinics, providing devices and technologies were “elements of care.” These students reminded us of the importance of that care and the expressed a need to continue this into the Fall and future. **Coaches, concierge services, and student support** areas will need to respond in remote environments. **SUNY must pay attention to this in our reopening plans.** Creating connections for students is critical

and includes connections to campus, to faculty, and to other students. Students shared that there are a variety of ways to reach out to students and stated the importance of having an **online orientation** in small sections in order to be inclusive. SUNY must consider how we habituate student support services; faculty are an important connection to these services. Our **freshmen and transfer students** have a particular vulnerability and every touch point matters; we must welcome our students differently. In order to be successful in a remote and online environment, SUNY needs to be first in class when it comes to student support.

Resources

Resources and recordings of this event can be viewed at <https://www.suny.edu/fact2symposium>

These include:

- Shared powerpoint slides
- Notes from Breakout Sessions
- Notes from Featured Sessions
- Recordings of each session