

CSU Student Success Network

Strategies for Practitioners

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In July and August of 2020, the [CSU Student Success Network](#) brought together over 150 faculty and staff across 21 CSU campuses to meet virtually to share strategies and learn from each other about student-centered, equity-driven online practices. Across the conversation series, called Navigating Uncertainty Together, we heard many creative strategies that our colleagues are using to increase student engagement, facilitate equitable remote learning, and ensure virtual support. In the spirit of learning from one another and working together to problem-solve during this unique semester, we want to share the following ideas we heard from our colleagues. We hope you find this useful in your work.

In Class

Rethink your syllabus. Make it friendly and accessible and demonstrate your care for students in it, including information beyond facts about the course.

Create connections with students by making time for one-on-one engagement. Use your Learning Management System (LMS) for easy sign-ups.

- Have a 15-minute virtual meet-and-greet with each student.
- Conduct individual check-ins throughout the semester.
- Arrive early or stay late to each Zoom session to create space for informal “chit chat” that students are not able to have frequently in this virtual environment.
- Ask students how they want to be engaged and what they need.
- Engage generally (e.g., asking how students are or what they want to share) before moving to course content.
- Hold daily office hours to provide flexible opportunities for students to connect.
- Leverage small group discussions.
- Flip your classroom and use synchronous time for discussions and connection.

Be flexible. Students are dealing with many factors that are out of their control. They may not feel safe. They may not be able to focus. Create policies that grant grace and acknowledge their best efforts.

- Extend deadlines.
- Create flexible modalities, for example, allowing students to opt in to class sessions and recording them so students can access content later on.
- Let students complete work at their own pace, but provide consistent weekly deadlines. Or make due dates “suggested” and require that all assignments be turned in by the end of the semester.

Center Maslow's Hierarchy in course structure and student engagement.

- Create activities and engagement that center self-care and support and frame them as such.
- Normalize strategies that support ease and comfort.
- Remind students (and yourself) that virtual interruptions are normal and expected.

Rethink assessment.

- What does it mean to learn and progress in our current context? Typical measures and tests may not be appropriate.
- Modify grading practices so that there are multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning.

Use technology in creative ways.

- Create videos to share course content or provide review and asynchronous support. House these mini-modules in your LMS so students have access to “consumable bites” of information that can be accessed anywhere.
- Use Twitter or Slack; create accounts for each class so students can engage with one another.
- Use the chatbox during synchronous classes.
- Use “incognito” mode to let students bring up wellness and mental health issues confidentially.
- Use simulation technology to create hands-on engagement.
- Make an LMS page for study strategies, tips and tricks, and other important course information.

Within support services and programs

Draw students in by thinking outside the box.

- Mail promotional goodies (campus or program branded) to students. During programs like orientation, encourage them to wear or show them, to create connections.
- Host virtual events that are not presentations. For example, open forums with breakout rooms with organized conversations starters to get students talking.
- Use Instagram, TikTok, or Twitter to host activity nights (e.g., game night, cooking classes, or painting night).
- Do a movie night through Hangouts with a discussion afterwards.
- Conduct social media chats for affinity groups.
- Provide campus tours via Instagram.
- Hold virtual book clubs (perhaps connected to courses or campus reading programs, or a theme such as social justice).



Expand service accessibility.

- Stagger service hours to include non-standard business times and drop-in appointments.
- Create financial wellness workshops.
- Share information in more than one way, on more than one medium (e.g. email, text, and website).
- Create virtual “front desks” for student services and Zoom links for departments and offices to easily refer students and reduce “bounce around.”
- Develop “cheat sheets” or how-to videos so students have the steps they need to go through to access supports. House in LMS as well as on the campus website.
- Use Slack and Google Voice to create easy ways for students to reach out and for you to reach out to them.
- Loosen dates for scholarships.

Leverage the campus community.

- Use peer mentors. Pay them via work study or other funds to provide income as well as support.
- Create major-based mentoring programs.
- Connect with faculty who have direct access to students and know their needs. This is a two-way street—they help craft supports but also need student services personnel to help them understand what is available.
- Connect with community supports to identify additional resources, such as laptops or jobs.
- Work with other departments to survey students strategically on what they need and how they are feeling so you can align supports and resources accordingly.

Use the power of place (virtually).

- Use Zoom backgrounds for campus.
- Stay up to speed on campus-based student events (e.g., virtual movies, tea, art gallery tours).

The CSU Student Success Network is facilitated by the [Education Insights Center \(EdInsights\)](#) at [Sacramento State](#). EdInsights is devoted to student success and the public benefits of education. Our mission is to inform and improve policymaking and practice for K-12 education, community colleges, and public universities.

