

Considerations for communicating with students during the COVID-19 move to online classes

1. Students will process information differently in a crisis than they will during normal times

- The first message you share with your students will carry the most weight; plan it carefully
- Teaching remotely is a professional inconvenience to us; it is life-altering for some of our students
- Avoid telling students “don’t worry”

2. We will need to serve as reliable sources of information

- Build trust with your students by remaining honest and open; only set reasonable expectations
- Do not undercut other University messages or provide conflicting information
- Acknowledge unknowns; do not speculate

3. Students will perceive risks through their own filters

- Be careful with making risk comparisons; they may make sense to us from a purely academic standpoint, but not all students will understand these comparisons (see #1, above)
- Involuntary risks, especially those which are not well understood, widespread, and have a serious outcome, are most dreaded

Considerations for a first* message to students:

First, express empathy	We are all going through this together and all have concerns of our own. Let your students know this.
Then, confirm facts	Let the students know the facts as you know them.
Acknowledge unknowns	Do not fill in information gaps with speculation.
Lay out a process	What are the next steps for the foreseeable future? Give a clear, concise set of procedures. Let students know how you expect the online course to run.
State your commitment	Let the students know you’re committed to their learning process and to sharing information with them. State a commitment to adjusting the course, as needed. Let students know you’re available to listen to their concerns.
Provide resources	Point students to a source for more information, including how you can be reached.

** This message structure would be appropriate for an opening to your first online class. It could be used for subsequent communications, as well.*

Selected source material:

[Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: by Leaders, for Leaders \(CDC\)](#)

[EPA Risk Communication in Action](#)

[Guidance on Developing Effective Radiological Risk Communication Messages: Effective Message Mapping and Risk Communication with the Public in Nuclear Plant Emergency Planning Zones](#)