Islands in the Stream

Fluidity in Teaching:
Adapting to a Constantly Changing Teaching Environment

Andrea Faber Taylor, PHD
Teaching Assistant Professor in Crop Sciences

Recently, our teaching environment has shifted from somewhat “routine and predictable” to more like a stream at flood stage. In this seminar, we will discuss making your course an “island” of respite and growth in the continual stream of information, new technology, and shifting classroom environments (in-person or virtual).
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1. Adapting your course to engage students in a variety of settings

2. Incorporating supportive and restorative activities for students

3. Investing in yourself – consistently be your best.
1. Adapting your course to engage students in a variety of settings

No longer this...

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1. Adapting your course to engage students in a variety of settings

Idea 1: Offer courses in flexible formats - supports students who can’t attend full time/in person

• OLP sections - add to serve distance learners
  • I hear so much gratitude from these students
1. Adapting your course to engage students in a variety of settings

Offering courses in **flexible format** supports students who can’t attend full time/in person

- OLP sections - add to serve distance learners
- Hybrid format –
  - one day / week fits student schedules, allows students to take your course [as an elective]

1. Adapting your course to engage students in a variety of settings

Offering courses in **flexible format** supports students who can’t attend full time/in person

- OLP sections - add to serve distance learners
- Hybrid format –
  - Online asynchronous on – campus
  - on-campus activities to visit
1. Adapting your course to engage students in a variety of settings

Idea 2: Adapt assignments to be accessible online asynchronous or off-campus

- Displays to visit independently
  - Video each station for off-campus students
- Pick up or mail kits to do at home
  - Growing plants from seeds at home

Idea 3: Students find a local example of ...

Learning Activity 2: Idea Garden (or any public garden) Hunt

1. Adapt assignments to be accessible online asynchronous or off-campus.
1. Adapting your course to engage students in a variety of settings

Idea 4: Help online & off-campus feel connected to you and to campus

Share what you are seeing today.

In announcements or a recorded lecture, open with:

“Here’s a picture of something I saw today related to this week’s topic…”

be ‘place-based’ not a talking head in cyberspace

Short *Walk and Talk* videos - adds variety to pre-recorded lectures. Little ‘commercial break’
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2. Incorporating supportive and restorative activities for students

Idea 1: Acknowledge the fatigue induced by information overload

Remind students to take “green” breaks not phone breaks.


Image: https://www.rawpixel.com/image/9244585/png-face-paper
Why “green” breaks?

Attention Restoration Theory

being in nature is mentally restorative

Attention Restoration Theory

Natural settings
- Engage our *involuntary attention* (easy)
  - E.g., fire, flowing water, wind in trees, wildlife

- REST our *directed attention* (effortful)

- Fostering *attention restoration from fatigue*

4 characteristics of restorative environments (nature)

1. Soft Fascination
2. Sense of Being Away
3. Extent
4. Compatibility


2. Incorporating supportive and restorative activities for students

Idea 2: Build in stretch breaks, encourage to step outside

Make like a tree and stretch! Starting again in 2 minutes
2. Incorporating supportive and restorative activities for students

Idea 3: Build in socializing – distance learners crave community

_**Horticultural Hangouts** – sometimes it’s very effective! Sometimes not.

Zoom Breakout Groups + Jamboards (visual summary of small group discussion)

I display one Jamboard at a time, group spokesperson points out highlights

TA generates a Wordcloud using terms from all Jamboards.
2. Incorporating supportive and restorative activities for students

Idea 3: Build in socializing – distance learners crave community

Breakout Groups + Jamboards
What students have said about:
...said her group ‘grew in confidence’ as a result of their presenting their final projects to each other. All felt very timid to start but after seeing each others’ projects and getting advice they feel much better and learned a lot.

...said she really got a lot out of her breakout groups and that that was the best part of the class. She was amazed by the diversity of experience and understanding (sometimes she was in groups with students who are currently educators and have lots of experience).

2. Incorporating supportive and restorative activities for students

Idea 4: Can it be done outdoors? Encourage this approach to assignments
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3. Investing in yourself
   take steps to consistently be your best self
**Investing in yourself**

**Idea 1:**

**Use your lunch break wisely**
Natural settings renew your attentional capacity.

**Take your lunch to the Arboretum**
(Lincoln Ave.)

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**Natural settings renew your attentional capacity.**

**Walk to the 2nd Street Detention Basin**
Natural settings renew your attentional capacity

**Illini Grove**
(Pennsylvania Ave.)

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**Investing in yourself**

Idea 2:
*Work in a library with green views*
Work in a library with green views

- Funk Library (College of ACES)
- Champaign Public Library

Large ongoing project?
Schedule weekly library time for only that project

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**Investing in yourself**

Idea 3: *Work outdoors for “fresh” ideas*

Switch to markers and paper
(no electronics)

Or
Reward yourself with a short walk after a block of focused attention
**Investing in yourself**

Idea 4:  
*Go outdoors evenings & weekends*

Local:  
• Buffalo Trace  
• Homer Lake  
• Shades & Turkey Run State Parks  
• Many others as well!

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**Investing in yourself**

Idea 5:  
*Get inspired! Read ‘a little bit’ about teaching every day*

E.g.,  
• Faculty Focus emails and podcasts  
• CITL workshops and newsletters posted  
• A few pages from a book about teaching
Right now!

Jot down some phrases or thoughts you have

“Baby steps” to take this week

Make your course more like an ‘island’ of respite and growth

Feel free to reach out if you want to discuss ideas further!

Andrea Faber Taylor
afabrtay@illinois.edu

Steamboat Rock, Shades State Park Indiana
Works cited


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