Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC)
University of Rajshahi
Online Teaching-Learning Guideline

1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has placed the academic institutions in a wonky situation, as all these institutions have remained closed since the 18th of March 2020. We are about to lose a year, and nobody knows when we will resume our classroom-based teaching-learning activities. Therefore, online teaching is one of the best possible solutions to save the students' academic career. This guideline will provide a general overview of the online teaching-learning environment to teachers and students of the University of Rajshahi. This guideline is divided into three sections. The first section provides some general guidelines about the online-teaching-learning and examination. The second section offers a few advice or tips to make the online teaching-learning effective, while the third section identifies infrastructural facilities required for online teaching beyond general guidelines.

2. General Guidelines for Online Teaching-Learning

2.1. The Use of Domain for Online Teaching and Learning

1. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has offered free premium access to Zoom, a video conferencing tool, to the public university faculties through BDREN. Therefore, the faculty members may consider using Zoom as a platform to offer online teaching to the students taking registration from the BDREN. They can either contact the BDREN at helpdesk@bdren.net.bd or contact the ICT Centre of the University of Rajshahi for registration. Besides Zoom, the faculty members may consider using other platforms like Google Meet to offer online teaching.

2. The teachers can use the Google Drive domain for uploading teaching materials/presentations/course materials. The faculty members may choose other domains to upload materials as per their convenience. They can also use e-mail, messenger, Facebook, and WhatsApp to disseminate reading materials. Another convenient way is to select a class representative in each class and send all materials to him/her so that he/she could circulate those within the class.

3. The faculty members may also choose to upload their video lectures for the students' convenience. They can also consider uploading presentations, videos, and notes for the students with a strong message that misuse of these materials will be prohibited. The students should also be warned that if someone misappropriates these materials, he/she will be brought under punishment.

2.2. Students' Attendance and Management (Regulations) of Online Classes

1. Since we can get a list of the participants in each class from the Zoom or Google Meet, the students' attendance may be maintained for the official purposes.

2. The faculty members may consider orienting the students on the modalities of conducting online classes. For instance, the students' speakers may remain mute when the teachers speak. However, the students may have the liberty to raise their hands to unmute the speaker or request teachers to unmute them if they have questions in mind that require clarification. Like the speakers, the students may keep their video off while listening to the teachers. However, they should keep their video on while discussing with the teacher during the question-answer sessions for ensuring interactiveness. However, the teacher should keep his/her video on to draw the attention of the students.

3. Informal discussions among peers during the class should be discouraged. The students should use formal language to ask any questions to the teachers using the chat option.

4. The students should log on to enter into their classes using their institutional ID and the name printed on their student card. Students who do not have an institutional ID may contact the ICT Centre of the University of Rajshahi to get their institutional ID.

5. Each session's duration should not be too long to keep the students' attention. However, if the faculty members wish to stay connected in a prolonged online class, they should provide a break of around 10/15 minutes between the hours.

6. Considering the strength of the signal of the internet and electricity supply, we should not consider taking too many classes in a week.

7. A general direction should be issued by the head of the Program Offering Entity (PoE) notifying that the faulty members would record their classes. This should be done from an ethical perspective. Moreover, this will allow the teachers to upload the course materials so that students failing to attend the class may be benefited. If any faculty members wish to record any activities with students' involvement beyond their regular classes, written or oral permission from the students should be sought before recording. Moreover, the faculty members should refrain from posting videos or screenshots of their formal classes on social media.

8. In the case of multiple sections of a class, the faculty members may wish to merge these sections at their discretion or disposal.

9. It is understood that taking practical classes is not possible unless the University remains open in full swing. However, theory classes concerning practical and research supervision may be continued virtually.

2.3. Online Class Routine Management and Monitoring

1. The respective Program Offering Entity's (POE) responsibility is to finalize its academic calendar and online class routine as per the direction of the RU rules.

2. The head of the POEs should oversee the online classes as they usually do in classroom-based teaching. Most importantly, they should ensure that the faculty members and students do not remain absent from the classes for a long time. The respective course

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teachers would report their classes' progress either before the academic committee/institute committee meeting or to the POE head.

2.4. Examinations

1. Unless a change is initiated and executed by the University authority on the examination system, the faculty members are advised not to take any online examinations.

2.5. Technical Assistance

1. The faculty members and students are requested to contact the ICT centre of the University of Rajshahi for any technical issues.

2.6. Security of Online Classes

1. Different provisions of the Digital Security Act of 2018 should be upheld while offering online classes using various platforms. Both the teachers and students should get an orientation about different provisions of the Digital Security Act, 2018.

3. Advice for Effective Online Teaching-Learning

1. To propose a unified general guideline to make online teaching-learning effective is difficult as each faculty member follows their own teaching style. However, the following tips/advice may be considered for making the online teaching-learning effective.

2. The teachers are encouraged to show their faces to the students instead of providing simple narrated slideshows. This will assist the teachers in keeping the students' attention to the class.

3. If the teachers use video as part of their class, they should keep the video's length to 10-15 minutes; otherwise, students may get distracted.

4. The teachers should test their PPT slides in smartphones to ensure that fonts and slides do not break in students' phones when shared.

5. The teachers should emphasize the existing materials instead of providing extra materials that may not be unavailable to many students.

6. Make sure that every student gets access to reading materials.

7. Teachers may consider engaging students in the discussion to make the class interactive.

8. Teachers may consider dividing students into groups to create opportunities for them to hold group discussions and remain in touch with their peers.

9. Online teaching is a relatively new phenomenon in our university context; please do not pretend that you are well acquainted with this medium. Instead, ask help from students to make it successful as this is new to both of you.

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10. Use different modes of presentation, including graphics, text, audio and video so that students find your teaching interesting.

4. Infrastructure Required for Online Teaching

In addition to different strategies adopted by the faculty members and students, several of the following infrastructural facilities are also required to make online teaching-learning effective:

1. The University Authority could consider taking the necessary initiative to provide institutional ID to each of the students. This will help the faculty members to locate the participation of the students correctly.

2. The ICT Center of Rajshahi University should remain active in providing technical assistance to the students and the faculties at the earliest possible time.

3. The IQAC could organize several workshops to train the faculty members about the general guidelines of the online teaching and application of Zoom for conducting online classes.

4. The ICT Center should be entrusted with the responsibility to offer training to the students on different aspects of online classes.

5. The respective POE should remain active in disseminating all information relating to the online activities through the departmental notice board and different virtual platforms.

6. Since we all know that people of the world are passing through the most critical times of this century due to the catastrophic effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mental health of students, teachers, and university staff have been affected. Staying at home for a long time has created a sense of fatigue mostly among the students. Therefore, the University authority should extend the coverage of mental health services to the students online. This information should also be disseminated through the institutional e-mail ID of the students, teachers and staff, and other virtual platforms.

5. Conclusion

The IQAC prepares this online teaching guideline to support the POEs in effectively conducting their online classes. Since it is a new experience for all of us, it is quite challenging to claim that this guideline is the best one to serve better to help the POEs. It is expected that this guideline would be modified over time based on faculty members' experiences.