

Strategic Leadership and Partnerships to Scale a Remote Teaching Infrastructure Rooted in Jesuit Values

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Abstract

Given Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies' experience and success marketing, recruiting for, developing, managing, and scaling online programs, in several distinct ways, SCS led, coordinated, and contributed to efforts to help the University navigate the unprecedented effect COVID-19 had on every facet of the institutional enterprise. Applying core Jesuit values such as *cura personalis* (care for the person) and *cura apostolica* (care for the institution), SCS endeavored to balance navigating strategy and change at the School level while also serving as a strategic partner at the institutional level. As SCS continues to chart a path in an increasingly unpredictable world, we are recalibrating and refining our strategy to capitalize on local, national, international lessons learned about creating a thriving organization in the midst of uncertainty.

Keywords: Strategy, leadership, values, organizational-change, higher-education

Serving as a Strategic Resource and Thought Partner Across the University

When the pandemic in the Spring 2020 term forced schools and workplaces across the world to go virtual, concurrently, the School of Continuing Studies (SCS) redesigned and restructured more than 240 courses for remote delivery formats and began serving as a strategic resource and thought partner for schools and academic and administrative units across the University. Early in the spring of 2020, SCS encouraged its faculty to be prepared to teach remotely in the fall, before we announced the school would operate virtually. Thus we immediately began formulating a strategy to accomplish this. At the same time, we were working to share knowledge of the model we were building with the larger university community for which teaching with technology was a new and unfamiliar venture. The experience of developing more than 160 online master's courses in five years positioned SCS to lead, coordinate, and contribute to efforts to help the University navigate the unprecedented effect COVID-19 had on every facet of the institutional enterprise.

While SCS has experience building programs at scale using the edX platform, the School does not employ a MOOC model. Online courses are designed with primarily

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asynchronous elements so as to serve students across time zones. Further, courses are designed to be taught by one faculty member with a maximum of 25 students, to ensure a high level of faculty to student and student to student interaction. The SCS course development model is scalable: within five years the School launched 13 online master's programs using a collaborative and cross-functional team approach. We worked with an external partner to transition three existing programs online and, at the same time, gradually built an internal infrastructure to support the design, development, and implementation of online programming. We constructed an instructional design and faculty support team beginning in 2015 with a director of online programs to a team of seven including designers and multimedia experts. Concurrently, we designed marketing, communications, and outreach strategies, as well as student support structures, to address the unique needs of learners at a distance. Each new master's degree program is simultaneously launched in two formats: in-person and online. Online enrollments grew from one program in January 2015, to 13 in 2020 with approximately 1500 students taking at least one online course per year.

Shared and Differentiated Challenges

The primary challenge was to concurrently scale remote learning at the local and university levels, given varying experience and interest in technology-mediated education. While there is an internal infrastructure at SCS to build asynchronous online courses, the team was already working at capacity creating new programs scheduled for launch in the summer and fall. The team included five instructional designers and two multimedia experts. To develop one asynchronous online course requires, on average, 10 hours per week from the design team and more than 100 hours from the faculty member. Hence, at the time, the School did not have a dedicated infrastructure to support scaling remote courses.

SCS makes a distinction between the attributes of online courses (asynchronous modules, authentic and applied projects, case studies, group assignments, custom multimedia elements, opportunities for voluntary synchronous sessions etc) and high quality remote courses. In the spring, most faculty teaching face-to-face simply substituted in-person sessions with teleconferencing tools, which sought to preserve interaction and engagement, but had inherent limitations, was overused and led to faculty and student exhaustion.

Despite the School's familiarity with the complexities and nuances of online learning and teaching, many of the challenges SCS faced in the early days of the pandemic and into the summer months were similar to those the University was in the midst of solving:

- Faculty readiness for teaching remotely;

- Student readiness for learning remotely;
- Accelerating the build of quality remote courses;
- Fluctuating guidance to support international students;
- Impact of virtual learning on enrollments.

Compounding these issues were differences across campus in regard to the mission and purpose of teaching with technology. The University's central teaching and learning support unit is designed to serve individual faculty members across the institution, and to research and explore a variety of approaches to teaching and learning using technology. The SCS model is the inverse of that: a scalable model that preserves faculty time, energy and expertise for subject matter teaching and students; and makes decisions about course components with the instructional design team. We defined the attributes of, and made distinctions among face-to-face, online and the various models of high-quality remote teaching. The attributes of the remote teaching models are unique and are not reflected by those at the polarities: face-to-face and online.

Comparable to SCS, but with a larger scope, critical challenges for the University encompassed raising awareness of the attributes of various technology-mediated modalities and building a scalable model to create upwards of 2,000 remote courses. Given the speed of the transition to instructional continuity, the majority of remote courses in the spring simply substituted in-person classes with synchronous Zoom sessions. This common experience, shared by many students across the university and the nation, had mixed reactions and responses. A frequent complaint was that numerous synchronous sessions a day and week led to fatigue, which for some, increased stress levels and challenges that inhibited participation. Further, many faculty felt compelled to lecture for the full class period as they would in person, exacerbating student fatigue and disengagement. SCS immediately began to consider the best method for supporting faculty in the process of teaching robust, highly interactive courses in a virtual environment, and to empower them to achieve quality in a modality that was a mix of in-person and online methods.

Despite SCS's experience growing online programs, redesigning and restructuring hundreds of courses for a remote environment was challenging. The online infrastructure was primarily designed to support the development of asynchronous online courses. For the University at-large, faced with nearly ten times the number of courses needing to be refactored with a proportionally smaller online support infrastructure, this was a monumental challenge. Thus, SCS designed a strategy to support the conversion of its face-to-face courses to remote formats, while also serving as a partner to the enterprise-wide effort. It was based on a three-

pronged approach: creating a remote course template faculty could use to rapidly develop, deploy, and transition a face-to-face course to a remote class; restructuring and training existing internal personnel to support the transition for all full- and part-time faculty (400+); and establishing a faculty development program to provide weekly and one-on-one instruction on online pedagogy.

Shared and Differentiated Strategic Goals

Three stages were used to develop the School's online program: first, SCS partnered with an Online Program Manager (OPM) to launch the first three programs online; second, it collaborated with the University's teaching and Learning unit to develop a cohort of programs; and third since the launch of the first program with an OPM, SCS had been currently developing an internal instructional design infrastructure. Each term, SCS offers approximately 400 credit-bearing classes, taught by 20 full-time faculty and nearly 400 adjuncts. Approximately 50 percent of the School's for-credit courses are delivered online. These courses were created to be asynchronous with limited synchronous components to allow students from multiple time zones to participate equally. While online courses are a significant component of the School's enrollment, in-person classes are equally vital to serve the diverse student population. For the University at-large, the residential experience is privileged, and face-to-face courses are the predominant mode of instructional delivery. Thus, SCS and schools across the institution endeavored to create a strategy to transition face-to-face courses to remote learning. Ultimately, the shared goal was to design classes inclusive of asynchronous and synchronous components that would augment the structure to achieve higher levels of interaction and engagement.

While the instructional design aspirations among leaders across the university were similar, because of the contrasting values and missions in regard to in-person and online instruction, the audiences and implementation strategies differed. The priority for the majority of schools was to work toward the preservation of the face-to-face model through remote means in order to meet the needs of traditional, residential learning communities. This was the underlying sentiment reflected through symposia, workshops and webinars to help faculty with the transition. Essentially, faculty were invited to explore pedagogical approaches and design principles and to create courses in a virtual environment through that creative, thoughtful process.

In contrast, the mission of the SCS online infrastructure was to meet the needs of its diverse audiences: the strategic goal was to adapt the School's teaching and learning model to the conditions in which learners could best access quality education and in which faculty could

expand pedagogical expertise and reach more students through technological means. Our approach was guided by these principles:

- The course design model should adapt as conditions and exigent factors shift;
- Course attributes and pedagogy will remain consistent: engagement, interaction, values, reflection, achievement of community, competencies, will be foregrounded;
- Faculty will focus on subject matter, teaching, students; the design and build process will circumscribe and support the faculty role;
- The School will scale horizontally, which includes expanding the notion of and design models of remote teaching, so there emerged a vast middle space of quality remote options, both synchronous and asynchronous;
- Horizontal scale also means experimenting with new and iterating on existing instructional design methods to transform teaching and learning across SCS's portfolio of programs.

While the number of courses SCS transitioned to a remote learning environment was proportionally smaller compared to the total of other schools at the University, the goals SCS earmarked during the initial stages of long-term instructional continuity served as a platform for the School's leadership to collaborate with the University:

- Raise awareness and change the language across the instructional community about the distinctions among online, remote, and in-person courses substituted with synchronous tools;
- Create a master course with research-based components and tools based on best practices that can easily be cloned and replicated on a mass scale;
- Establish a train-the-trainer model to scale the institution's technical and faculty support capacity;
- Conduct an inventory of staff and faculty positions to identify capacity, skills and knowledge that are transferable, so as to train and redeploy them as a faculty and course development support team;
- Create rubrics to guide faculty in the assessment of quality of remote courses and to coach part-time faculty in the course development process;
- Contribute to and elevate the institution's knowledge of quality technology-mediated education through faculty governance forums and teaching excellence symposia and workshops;
- Design tools to aid faculty in translating contact hours into engaging and interactive, synchronous and asynchronous activities;

- Advance marketing and enrollment management's focus on online programs.

Shared Values and Beliefs in Action

The strategic goals SCS articulated during the pandemic are underpinned by a common set of values and beliefs shared across the University's diverse community. Georgetown is a Catholic, Jesuit institution. We pursue a holistic approach to education, prepare students to serve as leaders and agents of change in the world, and commit to social justice as a core principle intrinsic to everything we do. Georgetown's students, alumni, faculty, and staff aspiring to be contemplatives in action is fundamental to animating our values, beliefs, and mission. While there are ten Schools comprising the institution, the pandemic reinforced the notion that we are One Georgetown. Reflecting *cura apostolica*, a Jesuit value referring to the care to be given to the work and commitments of the institution, SCS accepted invitations to speak to and serve on university-wide COVID-19 related committees and proactively engaged with faculty, staff, and university leaders to ensure the institution would continue to thrive.

The need to move all instruction to remote methods created concerns among faculty across the university about the extent to which the "Georgetown Experience," grounded in Jesuit values, could be animated in a virtual learning environment. They sought strategies and solutions to enliven these signature values while engaging with students at a distance. SCS had been pursuing this work at the school-level since 2016. In collaboration with the Associate Director of Ignatian Formation, SCS developed a framework titled, "Strategies to Integrate Jesuit Values into Online and On-campus Courses" (Novak & Ray, 2017). This document serves as a guide in the design and implementation of all online courses.

SCS contributed to university-wide efforts to navigate the challenge of assuring that a values-based education could be preserved despite the distance required to assure safety and the increased reliance of technology to bridge that distance. We used university-wide platforms, such as the Main Campus Executive Faculty (MCEF), the highest governance body on the Main Campus of the University, to showcase SCS designed processes, tools, and practices. Additionally, SCS leaders gave presentations at university forums on a number of topics, including creative approaches to deliver synchronous and asynchronous content, and techniques to estimate contact hours and student engagement in virtual learning environments.

As a result of regular participation in university-wide meetings, SCS learned of wide-spread challenges faculty faced across the institution. Faculty raised concerns about how to teach effectively remotely; how to assess student engagement and learning in online courses; how to recreate the Georgetown spirit and experience virtually; how to calculate student work time; and how to expedite the development of remote course development. Given SCS's prior

experience in these areas, the School partnered with central units serving all academic units across the University. The two primary divisions SCS worked closely with included the teaching and learning unit and the Office of the Registrar, which was charged with creating codes for course modalities that aligned with the methods through which the courses would be delivered, as well as external regulations for in-person requirements. Through regular meetings and consultation, we co-created instructional design templates, planned faculty training sessions, and conceptualized shared definitions of course design models.

Strategic Implications of COVID-19 and Change

COVID-19's impact on SCS's strategy was wide-ranging. It revealed segments of the School's faculty population which required foundational training on online teaching to successfully transition to a remote instructional environment; it exposed essential functions such as academic operations, student affairs, and online learning which were in immediate need of increased resources to manage the implications of the pandemic on students, faculty, and staff; and it elevated the urgency to continue to embed the university's Jesuit values into the School's decision making processes and refine communication practices to be faster, nimbler, and cross-functionally inclusive across hierarchical levels.

Challenge 1: Faculty Preparedness Across the Portfolio

In the Spring of 2020, when the School was faced with transitioning all face-to-face courses to a remote learning environment, one of the first metrics the leadership team sought to quantify was the percentage of courses available in an online or hybrid learning format. While the School's vertical growth of online programs focused primarily on bachelor's and master's degrees, SCS's portfolio is diverse and serves multiple markets. More than 70 percent of the students SCS serves enroll in non-degree programs, yet the vast majority of these offerings were not designed for online teaching and learning. In comparison, SCS offers 18 Master of Professional Studies (MPS) and executive education programs, fifteen of which were designed for online delivery. Thus, when the pandemic forced schools and workplaces around the world to go virtual in March 2020, within days SCS converted 245 credit and non-credit courses to remote delivery formats, and later moved similar numbers in the summer.

The faculty preparedness challenge was three-fold: one, how to quickly redesign face-to-face courses for remote delivery; two, how to implement just-in-time training to teach faculty competencies of exemplary instruction in an online learning environment; and three, how to differentiate faculty training reflective of the diverse design models across the School's portfolio of product offerings. To illustrate, at the beginning of instructional continuity, while more than

80% of faculty members in credit-bearing programs had prior online teaching experience, only a fraction of those in the professional development space (non-credit programming) had similar skills.

Challenge 2: Demand on Essential Functions

The second significant consequence of the pandemic on SCS's strategy was that it revealed essential functions requiring additional support and resources. Many divisions including academic operations, academic affairs, faculty affairs, student affairs, and online operations were routinely confronted with new COVID-19 related policies, projects, practices, and processes influencing how students learn and how faculty teach. In turn, these dynamic and unprecedented changes not only required staff to quickly learn and adapt to unfamiliar landscapes, it also necessitated additional resources to do so. More pointedly, leaders of the School's units found themselves in immediate need of skilled staff to contribute to the analysis, implementation, and oversight of initiatives designed to mitigate the risk of the pandemic having outsized repercussions on student learning and grades. To demonstrate, immediately following the decision to move to instructional continuity in Spring 2020, the University approved new pass/fail and withdrawal policies, as well as temporary probation and dismissal policies, requiring all Schools to adopt and tailor the protocols to their student and faculty populations. The effort to inform, implement, and monitor new policies was both time and resource intensive. It required cross-functional collaboration across the School and the University.

Another example to illustrate the resource demands COVID-19 placed on essential functions is in early summer, students intensified appeals for greater clarity around how courses would be structured in Fall 2020. Specifically, they were interested in more nuanced descriptions of faculty engagement and synchronous and asynchronous content embedded in remote classes. From the students' perspective, this qualitative data was useful in terms of better informing their course selection decisions. Historically, this level of detail had not been provided to students using existing tools, technology, and processes. Thus, to meet this new student request required an investment of cross-functional and cross-institutional collaboration to rethink and redesign systems, processes, roles, and responsibilities.

Similarly, international students who decided or were forced to return to their home countries in Spring 2020, but simultaneously continued their academic studies, were equally concerned about the clarity of course delivery formats. However, these learners were confronted with greater challenges including accessing the University's tools and systems to engage in course work from abroad. Thus, from technology issues, to immigration challenges, to feelings of uncertainty, isolation, and loneliness, international students required greater

attention and focus from academic affairs, academic operations, faculty, and counseling services. To be sure, feelings of uncertainty, isolation, and loneliness were emblematic of sentiments expressed across the SCS student population.

While it seems obvious COVID-19 had a tremendous impact on the School's online operations function, the reasons may not be equally transparent. Not only did the responsibilities associated with the online operations team swell from primarily supporting online courses to also facilitating the development of well-designed remote courses, the team increased its contributions to a cohort of programs developed by an OPM. A component of the School's strategy to transition all face-to-face classes to a remote learning environment was to copy and modify pre-existing content built for online delivery into remote sections of the course. Further, this resource intensive collaborative effort demanded enhanced multimedia design assets and placed greater emphasis on integrating Jesuit values and synchronous engagement into the courses.

Challenge 3: Rethinking Decision-Making Process

The third major effect of the pandemic on the School's strategy was it became increasingly essential for the leadership team to reinforce the importance of embedding Georgetown University's Jesuit values into the School's decision-making processes and refining communication practices to be faster, nimbler, and cross-functionally inclusive across hierarchical levels. Prior to COVID-19, SCS endeavored to flatten the organization's hierarchy and push down decision-making to teams directly impacted by proposed changes and initiatives. While empowering staff to make decisions at the local level helped improve adoption and buy-in, given the reverberations of the pandemic on every aspect of the School's operations, it heightened the need for leaders to calculate the impact of their decisions beyond local boundaries. Leaders found themselves not only having to make decisions much more rapidly, it was also crucial to gather intelligence and input from others across the organization and hierarchical levels. This approach allowed the School to assess and pilot test the up- and down-stream chain reaction of proposed decisions prior to moving forward with implementation. For example, intelligence gathered from surveys of faculty and students allowed program leaders to quickly implement and refine webinars and set up individual consultations. In addition, intelligence gathered from faculty, the academic operations team, and student advisors led to the development of a tool at the local level that facilitated data collection about course structure that was shared with students during advising sessions. Finally, the online team nimbly adapted its training modules for faculty as questions and suggestions emerged. The impact of localizing decision-making is that it increased trust within the community, it inspired more

experimentation, and it fueled a greater sense of pride, ownership, and accountability towards work.

Strategic Responses to the Challenges

The key to the challenge of moving hundreds of f2f courses to remote formats was to create a tiered project management system with differentiated roles and responsibilities.

SCS responded to these challenges in three strategic ways: first, strengthening the School's commitment to embedding and animating Jesuit values in decision making processes; second, deepening faculty director's leadership with new resources and oversight of adjuncts to assure the quality of the teaching and learning experience in remote environments; and third, redeploying and upskilling talented staff to support essential functions significantly impacted by instructional continuity.

Spurred by the global pandemic, the leadership team sought to strengthen the School's focus on integrating Jesuit values into the calculus of how decisions were made across the institution. Faculty and staff recognized that relying on ethics and values such as *cura personalis* and *cura apostolica* as the foundation for identifying and analyzing alternatives to solve unprecedented challenges in extraordinary times, would help to assure the quality of the School's collective decision-making processes. To achieve this end, a 25+ member cross-functional team of faculty directors and academic leaders developed shared principles emblematic of the University's Jesuit heritage:

1. Prioritize the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff in a manner which fosters a culture of trust and mutual respect
2. Advance the mission and values of Georgetown University
3. Embody the traditions and practices of academic excellence of Georgetown University
4. Honor the integrity of the classroom, physical and virtual, and the instructor-student relationship
5. Integrate flexible, environmentally responsive, and on-demand instructional strategies
6. Cultivate peer-to-peer learning, build community, and facilitate professional networks
7. Design student experience strategies inclusive of domestic and international learners
8. Leverage technology in scalable and innovative ways to support pedagogic goals and to elevate the school's position in a global landscape
9. Provide ongoing oversight of the quality of teaching, learning, and student experience
10. Animate the spirit of experimentation, agility, reflection, and flexibility
11. Actively engage stakeholders beyond our immediate community to innovate the next generation of best practices in professional and life-long learning

Second, to assure students and faculty of the quality of teaching and learning in a remote learning environment, we sought to deepen the faculty director's oversight of remote courses. The ways in which we aimed to accomplish this outcome were multifold. To advance the quality of instruction delivered remotely through the learning management system and enhance student experience in a virtual environment, two instructional continuity rubrics were developed in collaboration with faculty and academic leaders for use across SCS: The Remote Course and Student Experience Rubric (Ray, 2020). These tools and materials provide guidance to support teaching remotely with a combination of synchronous and asynchronous tools. In addition to training on the use of the tools, faculty leaders were asked to use the rubrics as guides to assess the quality of faculty teaching throughout the term.

Another strategy SCS implemented to safeguard the quality of the student learning experience was the online team, in collaboration with the University's central teaching and learning unit, developed the Georgetown University Canvas Course Template (Georgetown University, 2020) The template was designed to help faculty quickly learn how to create and deliver a remote course in Canvas. The template includes a pre-designed student orientation, sample course module templates, Ask the Professor discussion board, a sample syllabus, a sample instructional continuity syllabus addendum, and relevant faculty training resources to help instructors build course content. Further, to measure the impact of these efforts, SCS designed and implemented instructional continuity surveys to periodically collect data from students and faculty about their learning and teaching experience, respectively.

An additional pillar promoting the School's strategy to demonstrate the rigor and quality of remote courses was an accelerated effort to expand awareness and use of an instructional design framework to integrate Georgetown's Jesuit values (Novak & Ray, 2020) into courses. The purpose of this tool is to illustrate how faculty can use tools and technology to integrate the University's Jesuit values into online and on-campus courses.

Third, the School responded to the implications of COVID-19 on essential functions through redeploying and training existing faculty and staff to contribute to areas significantly affected by prolonged instructional continuity. Faculty and staff from the English Language Center, the operations team, and the Dean's Office were identified to assist academic operations and the online operations teams. For instance, given the speed with which the School needed to scale the number of courses transitioning to remote delivery, four staff members were temporarily assigned to help the online operations team copy and modify pre-existing content built for online delivery into the remote sections of the course. This was a substantial undertaking not only because of the scope and complexity of the work, but also due

to the intensive training needed to teach staff with no experience designing online courses how to successfully contribute to the effort. The infusion of additional resources within the online operations and academic operations teams, specifically, helped leaders rebalance and redistribute responsibilities to bring workloads to manageable levels. Below is a chart summarizing how SCS redeployed existing resources to support functional groups:

Table 1

SCS Redeployment of Resources

Deployed from	Deployed to Support	Projects
English Language Center	Online Operations	Faculty training
Operations Team	Online Operations	Online and remote course preparation
Dean's Office	Online Operations	Online and remote course preparation
English Language Center	Academic Operations	Program Support
Operations Team	Academic Operations	Program Support

The Future: Scale and Innovation in the Midst of Uncertainty

As SCS continues to chart a path in an increasingly unpredictable world, we are recalibrating and refining a strategy to capitalize on local, national, international lessons learned about creating a thriving organization in the midst of uncertainty. One of the lessons discovered is that there are many notions of what online education means across the university. Articulating the gradations within online education is important as it influences pedagogical design, required resources, training, students' enrollment decisions, and most importantly, the student experience. As leaders who have been immersed in designing and delivering online programs for many years at several institutions, we continue to observe that one thing remains constant: the majority of traditional undergraduates do not want to study primarily "online." This does not mean they are unaccustomed to researching, communicating, and socializing with technology. As a generation, they are very tech savvy. It simply means the social environment is crucial to their sense of engagement, belonging, and interactions. On the other hand, graduate students, adult learners, and professional students are at a different stage in life, and while they may prefer to learn in a class, they tend to have more structured lives, more responsibilities, and can readily adapt to variations of online learning environments.

Another important lesson learned is faculty members are eager to learn from other faculty how to integrate asynchronous and synchronous strategies into courses. While some will

simply opt out because they are uncomfortable or prefer not to teach using technology, leveraging faculty as a resource can accelerate the number of educators who have the dexterity and competencies needed to successfully teach in varied learning environments. These skills coupled with the availability of on-demand and research-based templates, tools, and models not only improves the quality of course design, it also expedites the process and leads to the development of resilient organizations

Considering these lessons, moving forward, the School of Continuing Studies aims to sharpen its strategy around five key elements: strengthen relationships with academic divisions and central units to serve as a resource in supporting university-wide efforts to scale online learning; redouble efforts to accelerate the development of new programs to grow enrollments in new and existing markets; invest in the creation of a global, scalable, and agile instructional design models to create pandemic-proof courses; reshape the structure of the School to cultivate the talent and skills needed to support the organization as it flexibly responds to shifts in the global economy; and deepen the School's commitment to social justice and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion, not just within SCS, but around the globe. At the center of all of these elements is a renewed vision for teaching and learning.

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