Supporting student wellbeing during COVID-19
Tips from regional and remote Australia

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In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching staff at universities across the world are being told they must shift courses from face-to-face to online delivery — not next year, not next semester, but next week. Some colleagues have been teaching online for many years, but for many of us it is a daunting change.

In this time of physical distancing, the preliminary findings of my NCSEHE Equity Fellowship research on supporting the mental wellbeing of mature-aged students in regional and remote Australia may be helpful, given the majority of participants study online. Their experience is quickly becoming the "new normal"; with almost all tertiary study suddenly online, no longer is it a tyranny of distance for the few, on the periphery and out of sight.

The survey and interview findings highlight the importance of teaching practices and the learning environment on student wellbeing. What can we learn from these regional and remote students to support students' mental health, wellbeing and success, in the context of learning and teaching online?

1 **Know students' needs: understand their diverse circumstances.**
Tip: Take an inclusive approach to your course content, delivery and LMS tools; think about: Who is it including? Who is it excluding? Accommodate all students and follow Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

2 **Be aware of practical challenges: e.g. bandwidth.**
Tip: Keep your technology simple and ensure that lecture recordings and other materials are downloadable, not just streamable.

3 **Facilitate student connections.**
Tip: Provide opportunities on your LMS for students to communicate synchronously (e.g. Collaborate/Skype/Zoom meetings) and asynchronously (e.g. discussion boards).

4 **Provide opportunities for Q&As.**
Tip: Dedicate a regular Collaborate/Skype/Zoom meeting for Q&As about upcoming assessment tasks (and record them for students who can't make it). Also provide asynchronous Q&A opportunities (e.g. on discussion boards).

5 **Check in with students: online learning can be lonely and isolating.**
Tip: Be approachable and proactive in supporting students. Check in with them semi-regularly in a personalised way, particularly with students who can't attend synchronous sessions.

6 **Promote your university's student services (e.g. counselling).**
Tip: Draw your students' attention to your university's services, such as counselling, disability services and academic learning support.

7 **Your impact is enormous: it's the small (human) actions that count.**
Tip: Don't forget the impact of your actions — it's the little, kind, human things that really matter!

View the full article and corresponding webinar on supporting student wellbeing during COVID-19:
https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/student-wellbeing-covid-19-regional-remote-australia/