



PMU

ACADEMICS NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2020

E-LEARNING at PMU

during COVID-19

Seminar & Webinars

Various seminar and webinars are being organized by PMU colleges and centers. The Webinar and Seminars are to be published on PMU website and other various media outlets. In addition, any recording of these events will be edited and published in the PMU official YouTube channel.

Law Accreditation

PMU law department was approved for a 5-year accreditation by a French international accreditation agency High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres)



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Online Learning in the Preparatory Program

Background: The Preparatory Program has been using online assessment through the Blackboard platform since 2010. The initiative was piloted first on the male campus at the Advanced level for several semesters and then extended to the female campus and at all levels. Later, the use of the SEB Lockdown Browser was implemented to ensure testing security. As learners and faculty in the department became more confident and experienced with Blackboard, the practice was expanded for use with an external online objective test from the British Council. In 2014, the Department started to use Blackboard Collaborate, but it was discontinued when Blackboard was upgraded. After requesting and pointing out the benefits of Collaborate, the feature was made available for piloting just a few months prior to the current emergency.



Learning and Assessment in Spring 2019-2020

Given the background online experience in the Preparatory Program, there was a smooth transition to distance learning. On March 9, anticipating the need to switch to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all Preparatory Program instructors participated in a training session led by the Program Director, Dr. Ahmad Nuriddin, and with the assistance of Mr. Imran Syed of the IT Department on the use of Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. This feature of Blackboard was one that had already been used effectively by the director and faculty members in meetings with educators in other parts of the world –notably with universities in Brazil and the United States, as part of the COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) program. Therefore, the presenter could attest with confidence to the reliability and efficacy of the platform to be used for online learning, teaching, and assessment. From March 17 to 19, three more training sessions were conducted by the Director of the Preparatory Program on conducting assessment via Blackboard Collaborate. The sessions covered testing speaking and listening online in a secure environment. Concurrently, the use of Microsoft Teams was also initiated by PMU management so that instructors and administrators could speak with each other using their phones or computers in place of their office phone and face-to-face meetings. Microsoft Teams was also instrumental in continuing to offer BVIP classes online. Our thanks to Mr. Jermaine Francis and Ms. Krista Osborne who worked arduously to ensure the continuation of the BVIP program even during these challenging times.

Throughout the current term, Preparatory Program instructors have taken advantage of multiple webinars advertised by PMU's Professional Development Center to upgrade their teaching and learning skills. Through webinars offered by National Geographic Learning, Pearson, McGraw-Hill, Oxford, and Cambridge publishers, instructors have been learning about how to convert traditional courses to online successes and sharing tips on useful apps and techniques for engaging learners.

Test security has been an area of concern given the ease with which unmonitored students could engage in academic misconduct. Thanks to the Preparatory Program instructors' previous experience with SEB and more recently with Respondus Lockdown Browser, the Department has been able to successfully pilot Respondus Monitor, which builds on Lockdown Browser and uses the student's webcam to deter cheating. The program offers video analytics, is integrated with Blackboard, and guarantees privacy and confidentiality.

In summary the online teaching, learning, and assessment experience for students and faculty in the Preparatory Program has been one of challenges and successes. The main challenge faced by all was that of online connectivity, especially in the first week of the online classes. Thankfully, that issue was resolved by rescheduling and staggering classes. However, there are still some instructors without reliable internet connection. Providing quality connection in the various housing areas might be considered as a solution. Looking forward, the Preparatory Program will continue to improve its online learning facilities and encourage instructors to upgrade their online teaching skills for summer courses and beyond.

Beyond Bricks and Mortar

This spring, the Core Program embraced the challenge of virtual classrooms. Though, in reality, there was nothing “virtual” about them. Faculty and students quickly adapted to the very real new paradigm of teaching, learning and assessments extending beyond the four walls of the traditional classroom.

The transition was not without its challenges. But, with the goal of providing as much constancy as possible for

the students, faculty quickly adapted. They embraced the use of Blackboard (Bb) Collaborate Ultra as their online teaching platform, held Course Room meetings with students and provided online office hours. By doing so, the Core Program faculty were able to minimize disruptions for the students and their education.

Also during this virtual semester, Core faculty created a Bb group which held regular meetings, sometimes twice a week, to keep up

-to-date with instructions from PMU management and the Ministry of Education. The Dean was also present at some of these meetings.

This Bb group proved to be a valuable way of enabling all faculty to connect with each other by helping to maintain a sense of cooperation and collegiality as well as sharing experiences with online teaching including offering suggestions and tips. Lastly, it enabled discussion of normal departmental matters that still continued despite being off-campus.

By taking advantage of technology, faculty worked overtime to upskill themselves by using online resources which included attending webinars offered by PMU’s Professional Development Center. Also, workshops on how to create online tests and how to find web resources were run by the Core Program faculty.

In addition to teaching and assessing students, as well as learning new skills, faculty used this time to focus on research projects and continue with academic collaborations.

Although on-campus activities have been curtailed, everyone put their energy into creating online versions. It seems that students responded very well to this new mode of learning. In fact, attendance was excellent and there was a strong interaction which supported success to cope with this unprecedented .



College of Engineering



In the wake of dealing with the impact of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on students, faculty and the general public, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU) Colleges of Engineering and College of Architecture and Design have successfully migrated all their spring 2020 semester course offerings inclusive of lecture, studio design and laboratory courses to an online modality mainly via Blackboard Collaborate. Other media channels and platforms such as YouTube, Zoom and webex are used to conduct virtual experiments and simulations and hold virtual office hours and conduct meetings.

Each course content switched immediately to be delivered in a synchronous mode to the students from anywhere who are enrolled in each and every course in a virtual classroom setup that mimics the very same face-to-face modality. Faculty members utilize two-way video, audio and chat communications and share power point presentations, documents and specialized applications software as well as input devices and tablets that function as a classroom “Whiteboard” or “smart board” to conduct their instructions in a traditional way that involve hand writing, sketching and solving mathematical problems

that best serve their students maximum learning experiences. Content is also recorded and archived on the cloud so that students can have access to them at any time and from anywhere. This is an added value that is very much appreciated by all learners that distance education makes possible. While often difficult and very time consuming, all faculty members managed to deliver quality course content materials and maintained highest interactions with their students. Faculty members utilized a combination of direct and indirect assessment tools to ensure that each and every course learning objectives and students outcomes in milestone and high stake courses are not compromised. IT technology challenges encountered by faculty and students were addressed and resolved to the satisfaction of faculty and students. PMU’s early investments in on-campus IT infrastructure and in equipping its faculty members and students with computing hardware and software resources as well as training faculty members and staff in designing instructional courses for online offerings eased the “overnight” switch in from in-class to at-a-distance modality due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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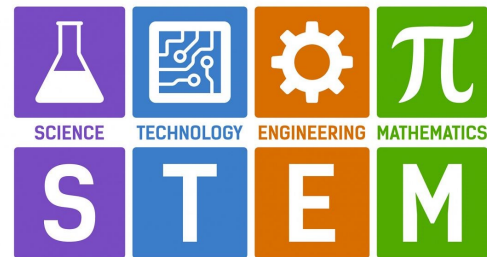
All faculty members were empowered and supported in their individual and collective innovations to meet course specifications and document best practices in their end-of-semester course reports and program annual reviews required for academic accreditation data collection and analysis.

College and Department levels council meetings and committees were held informally weekly as chats and bi-weekly as formal documented meetings.

Faculty members attended and presented at national and international virtual conferences and webinars sponsored by PMU as well as by a multitude of professional societies and organizations. They continue to work on their scholarly activities and research projects and publish their papers in journals and conference proceedings.

New initiatives undertaken by the university include offering webinars featuring speakers on topics of interest to students, faculty, alumni and professionals. These are made available to the public. The webinars speakers present talks on a wide range of applied research and development topics. They include interviews with subject matter experts and industry

leaders. Planned webinars will address at-a-distance engineering teaching and learning pedagogies including virtual laboratories, senior design projects and internships challenges and opportunities in the era of post COVID-19. Also, they will include hosting panel discussions on STEM education and outreach. Conducting virtual training and professional



development workshops will increase in numbers, frequency and expand in scope and outreach to all internal and external constituencies. Futuristic studies, technological entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence and industry 4.0 are all part of PMU's interdisciplinary strategic inventory of academic online offerings that are already underway before the COVID-19 pandemic. They will only accelerate and scale up once COVID-19 pandemic is no longer a threat to mankind anywhere in the globe.

An aerial photograph of the Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University campus, showing various academic buildings, green spaces, and parking areas.

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PMU 

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College of Law: Response to the COVID-19 Crisis



Distance Learning

The College of Law immediately switched to online learning via the Blackboard Collaborate platform, starting March 9th 2020. Synchronous lectures were delivered with various methods of assignments, students' online presentations, and tests. The Quality Assurance Committee and the College Council examined the implementation of assessment and grading verification methods and suitable additional indicators to be added to the course portfolios to keep up with PMU policies and standards. The following table shows the performance of the College in numbers (9/3/2020 to 22/4/2020):

Virtual Classes	Delivered online lectures (hours)	Student attendance (male and female)	Recorded lectures
96	642	10930	589

Students doing their Learning Assessment III course have continued their courses as usual. Internships have continued in conformance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and PMU. Some instructors conducted additional online lectures to allow for newly introduced assignments and presentations to cope with distance learning.

Collegial support and cooperation has been a strength. From the inception of online learning, faculty with knowledge or previous experience with BB Collaborate and building online tests offered guidance to their colleagues. Even after faculty members started working from home, they continued to receive and give support through virtual meetings, WhatsApp groups, and individual communication with the Dean, Chair, and Associate Chair.



Webinar on the Legal Impact of COVID-19

To keep senior law students connected with ongoing legal issues, the College organized a two-hour webinar on legal aspects of the COVID-19 crisis delivered by Dean Bashayreh. The webinar discussed legal consequences for existing contracts, corporate governance, financial distress of companies, and dispute resolution.





Virtual Management Meetings

College meetings were organized virtually on BB Collaborate. All meetings considered usual business as well as the requirements of quality and coordination during the period of distance learning. The following meetings were conducted in March and April 2020:

1. One general faculty meeting: Law faculty members engaged in discussions regarding online assessment and student engagement to ensure that course learning outcomes are achieved through distance learning.
2. Two College Council meetings
3. Three departmental meetings
4. One QA Committee meeting
5. One meeting of master's program committee
6. A virtual meeting of the Chairs via Zoom to discuss and arrange course offerings for Fall 2020.



Advisory Board Meeting

The Advisory Board held its second meeting for the academic year 19/2020 on 20 April 2020 on BB Collaborate platform. Four advisory members have participated with five faculty members. The members of the Board have reflected on the impact of the COVID-19 on the legal profession and litigation, the proposed master's program, and opportunities of student training and internship in the current health situation. The Board has appreciated the efficiency of PMU in switching to distance learning and showed support to the College's endeavors to ensure continuous opportunities for students' exposure to the legal professional community through internships and extra-curricular activities that may be organized in possible platforms during the current situation



International Participation

Virtual study team of the International Association of Law Schools: Dr. Mohammad Bashayreh participated in the virtual meeting of the Europe Study Team to discuss the continuity of the activities of the International Association of Law Schools during the current situation.



American Bar Association Webinar 30 April 2020: In the context of the MoU signed between PMU and ABA, the College and ABA will organize a webinar with presenters from Georgetown Law School to exchange experience and ideas on distance learning, as Georgetown has, too, switched to online learning.

College of Business Administration's Online Learning Strategy

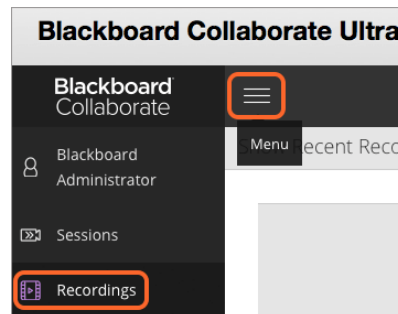


The College of Business Administration was well-prepared for delivering online learning to students well before the unplanned outbreak of the corona pandemic. Specific courses, such as e-commerce, were transformed so that it could be delivered through Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. This transformation took place under the scholastic guidance of scientific findings for online teaching and learning. The college developed best practices for delivering online courses such as breaking learning into smaller parts of knowledge, having clear expectations for online participation, providing immediate and frequent feedback through online knowledge checks, and chatting with students to keep them motivated and learning.

By utilizing Blackboard Collaborate features, all classes and office hours were held on time ensuring that the curriculum was taught and that students had the opportunity to communicate any issues they might have in a timely manner. Faculty have made a conscientious effort to ensure that student assessments are marked in a timely fashion and grades are uploaded on Blackboard. Students were also provided with the necessary feedback in order to improve their performance in the future. The delivery of the courses was differentiated from the face to face teaching using mostly online resources for student engagement. The delivery of resources in virtual classroom was based on small knowledge units followed by a discussion and exercises. This way students were continuously engaged with the class in group discussions with cycled responses and interactions.

How do you ensure student engagement? The college has responded to this quest by using various online

tools such as Virtual Class. Faculty created a new session at the class scheduled times and students had to join the session. The instructor could interact with students exactly as in a physical class. Instructors may upload files or applications for sharing or use the white board. Blackboard was used extensively for sharing all the learning materials including e-books, presentations, and exercises. In these interactive teaching methodologies, students are assessed for their participation and their valid arguments. In the delivery of some courses, simulation tools were applied using the share application option of Collaboration Ultra. Learning tools, such as online discussions have enhanced the learning experience. That was especially helpful for students that may not participate in face to face teaching. The teaching philosophy of applied learning was implemented through case studies. The case studies were delivered in electronic form and students



worked in groups to respond to the applied questions.

The institutional support for all programs has a direct impact on student success. The entire

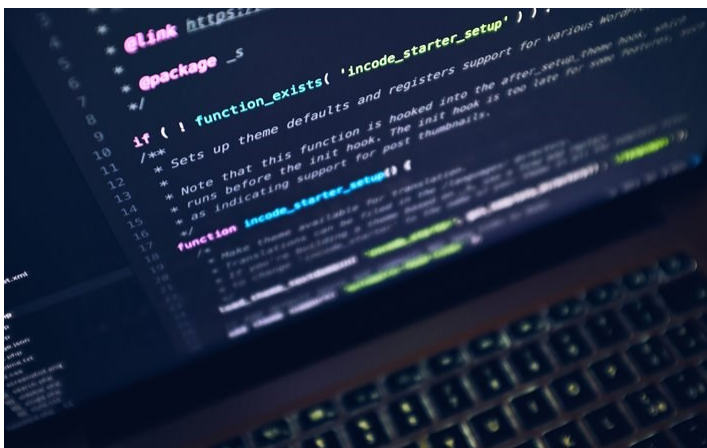
campus community relies on a variety of departments to provide a functional, and culturally rich environment for learning and team work. The infusion of technology into the university environment enables students to obtain the information they need, when and where they need it, so they can effectively pursue their goals of academic excellence and professional competencies. PMU is identified in the region as the leading IT-based institution. The ultimate goal of this technology vision is to make it possible for PMU to create a learner-centered environment. The College of Business Administration directed its efforts from the start toward a number of targeted goals, each of which will bring the university closer to achieving its mission and realizing its vision, and technology will be a tool that assists students in building their professional competencies, abilities in critical thinking, skills in problem solving, and dedication to leadership and teamwork.

CCES Virtual Teaching

The COVID19-related curfew and the PMU decision to conduct teaching virtually gave CCES Faculty and students an opportunity to experiment with many online teaching tools such as Blackboard Collaborate and Zoom. Classes were held online, lectures were recorded allowing the students to view them again, student questions were answered directly, electronic versions of homework and laboratory assignments were collected and graded, exams were held online, and grades were reported via Blackboard Grade Center.

Office hours were also held online via Blackboard Collaborate and allowed students to chat with Faculty in real time, clarify work assignments, and inquire about due dates and grades.

Online laboratory sessions featured Laboratory Instructors demonstrating a real experiment recorded in the Laboratory (before the curfew), a programming tutorial session with the Instructor writing the program code or showing Powerpoint slides of program code, or demonstrating the concept using a simulator. The latter method was mainly used by hardware courses.



distributed to participants after the meeting via email.

Senior projects were demonstrated remotely and Faculty in charge of reviews logged in remotely to view and question the students' work.

In addition, College meetings were held online. For example, a CCES College meeting was successfully held online on April 13, 2020, via Zoom, with over 20 participants including Faculty, Lab Instructors, Lab Technicians, and Secretary. The meeting went smoothly with no issues, directions were communicated, participants were able to share ideas, as in face-to-face meetings. The meeting minutes were