Teaching & Learning in COVID times

by Martin Mik
Director of Student Experience, School of Life Sciences

The School of Life Sciences offers degrees with real world impact. 2020 has made these very prominent, with epidemiology and virology now household terms.

However, we have had to adapt our teaching in response to the pandemic. Some of these changes were necessitated by the requirement to keep Covid-safe, but we have also taken the opportunity to introduce planned changes; only earlier and without a pilot phase! For example, all of our assessment has moved online. Not using standard exams provides us with more flexibility and helps us move from testing students’ memory to testing their understanding. This replicates the real life tasks our students are likely to face in the future much better than standard exams.

Social distancing requirements mean we cannot, at the moment, deliver our lectures face-to-face. Our lecturers pre-record these and release them on a weekly basis, giving our students an opportunity to go through the content at their own pace and ask questions via online fora or Q&A sessions.

Our focus has been on ensuring face-to-face delivery of tutorials and labs. Tutorials are delivered in small groups in standard teaching rooms to accommodate social distancing. Those students who cannot join in person participate via Teams. Lab sessions have been adapted too and are delivered to smaller groups. This ensures that our students get time in labs and focus on the skills critical to their degrees. Robust risk assessment keeps our students and staff safe.

We all look forward to the pandemic being over and the return of standard teaching practices. However, we know that our current delivery of teaching and learning is effective. We are working with our students to make improvements and are reviewing the current model to see what elements to retain in the future to make our ‘standard’ provision even better.

In June 2020 Martin Mik won the Warwick Student Union, Student Voice & Impact Award for Outstanding Academic Convenor.
Biomedical Science student Joshua Gibbs has published a first author paper as part of his Undergraduate Research Support Scheme (URSS) project. The research was featured in a recent press release entitled ‘Plant-based diets shown to lower blood pressure even with limited meat and dairy’. Press Release (27 July 2020).

About his URSS experience, Joshua says ‘it has genuinely made going to university worth it for me!’.

You might also like to read what Biomedical Science student Paul Kihiko has to say about his URSS student experience.

Nearly there!
Our new state-of-the-art building for biomedical research is due to be finished very soon. The internal fit-out is progressing and public realm works, to complete the outside areas round the building, began in December.

The New Year will see an official opening, including the 400-seat lecture theatre for undergraduate teaching and a brand new cafe.

The joy of seeds
The UK Vegetable Genebank is a vital collection of ~14,000 seed samples, kept in long-term storage at -20°C in facilities on our Wellesbourne Campus. It has become a hugely important resource for plant breeding and research and we send seed out to plant scientists, breeders and farmers around the world. New varieties need to be developed constantly so that vegetables continue to provide vital nutrition as our environment changes and our planet’s population increases.

Dr Charlotte Allender, UK Vegetable Genebank Manager, shares her love of working with seeds.

iGEM medal success
The International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) competition is an annual event inspiring thousands of students to build a better world by solving problems with the help of synthetic biology. In November, the Warwick 2020 iGEM team secured a gold medal at the iGEM Virtual Giant Jamboree for their colibactin detection kit. SLS team members were Tudor Onose, Jade Oh, Valeriia Nadmitova, Adriana Lopez Gonzalez, Grace Goater and Andris Gyori. They were joined by undergraduates from Maths and Computer Science.

Find out more about the project

Bringing two worlds together
by Beth Hill
BSc Biomedical Science graduate

"Having graduated from Warwick this July, it’s fair to say that my final term of university wasn’t as I had planned. Us students had to deal with the initial impact of Covid-19 and the uncertainty that this brought with it. Being thrust into this huge unknown at a very crucial time in our university journey with final assessments around the corner (whilst simultaneously all the fun stuff was cancelled or postponed), the dialogue between staff and students at universities across the globe, shifted.

The School of Life Sciences (SLS) already had a well-established focus on student experience, but this need for students and staff to collaborate in an everchanging environment, was a new level still. It’s this practice, which I experienced first-hand, that I have taken into my new role as Placements and Student Experience Officer within SLS. I support students and communicate with them in the way in which I appreciated when I was in their position not so long ago.

Having experienced student life (including Covid-19) at Warwick and now working as a member of staff, I have a somewhat unique perspective on the challenges facing both the student and staff communities. As a student, you don’t see the time, thought and energy that goes into making intricate decisions to benefit you. And as a member of staff you don’t see the reassurance that floods a student cohort when they are provided with the opportunity to co-create and take ownership of their education.

I hope to continue to bring these two worlds closer together by reflecting on my personal experiences."

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