Online Learning with Ruth Elizabeth Morris

[00:00:00] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:00:00] Hey everyone, welcome to another episode of The LAUNCH Podcast. This is Kayla Hogrefe, academic advisor, UConn Hartford.

[00:00:16] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:00:16] And I'm Emma Bjorngard-Basayne, academic advisor at the Stamford campus.

[00:00:20] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:00:20] In this episode, we're going to listen as Emma talks to Ruth Elizabeth Morris, who is a program coordinator in our office. She manages the launch campaigns that you all receive on a weekly basis, and she is also an instructor for the business communications class.

[00:00:35] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:00:35] Yes. And in this episode we talk about some tips and tricks for you to keep in mind now when classes are moving online, so how to complete group assignments, things to think about as you structure your work as a group.

[00:00:50] We also talk about how you can build community with your classmates. Using different apps and then also some important questions that you should consider. So for [00:01:00] example, our assignments changing now, are they new due dates? and how to communicate a little bit with your professor around assignments and for example, what a good discussion post might look like.

[00:01:12] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:01:12] Sounds great, Emma. Those are all really important things for students to hear about at this point in time. So let's take a listen to your conversation with Ruth Elizabeth.

[00:01:30] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:01:30] What's your name and what do you do at UConn?

[00:01:33] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:01:33] My name is Ruth Elizabeth Morris. I am the coordinator for the launch program for the office of undergraduate advising in the school of business. But in another life I studied English, rhetoric and writing. So I also am adjunct faculty. I teach our business communications course in Waterbury.

[00:01:50] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:01:50] Great. so how can students take steps to be successful by learning remotely for the rest of the semester?

[00:01:59] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:01:59] You know, I [00:02:00] think the most important thing to do is going to be staying organized, right? There's a lot happening very quickly, and we're all, I think, practicing our skills and being adaptable. So even if writing things down on to do lists or having a calendar is not typically the routine that you set for yourself.

[00:02:22] One of the best ways to ensure that you will be successful is to be proactive in battering. Information and deadlines and making sure that it's all in one place so that you aren't missing any pieces. What sorts of things are you thinking about Emma as you are trying to stay organized yourself.

[00:02:40] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:02:40] I definitely, try to have, as you said, a calendar where I block off time for different projects that I'm working on.

[00:02:49] But then also the other day I actually downloaded a new, to do list application or app for my iPhone. I know that I have one on my iPhone already, but I liked [00:03:00] how the design on this one was different. So it kind of helped me motivate myself to start a, to do list. And then prioritizing the different tasks that I need to get done in a day.

[00:03:10] I would say that's the main thing that I've been doing lately.

[00:03:14] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:03:14] I love that. The idea of downloading on half as a to do list, sort of moving away from the pen and paper. You can do similar things with. Google suites. I know a lot of students, everybody's got a Gmail account from the university. Do they have access to Google calendar?

[00:03:32] You can then sync the calendar with a to do list as, as part of that tool. So that's an electronic version of the tool as well. And then you can also set it so that you get reminders. When things need to happen so you can set the reminder to be like a day before something is due, or 15 minutes before something is due.

[00:03:51] I don't know. It depends on how under pressure.

[00:03:54] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:03:54] No, totally. So since that kind of helps you prioritize, like when to get things done, [00:04:00] why would you say, or what would you say. Students can do, like while they're working, while they're going through their assignments and you know, completing their readings and writing papers and things like that.

[00:04:11] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:04:11] There's a lot of research that shows that the human brain is most successful in retaining information when they are mono-tasking. So completing one task at a time. So I know this is. Such attempting time to turn on a movie in the background while you're working on a paper or working on an assignment.

[00:04:33] But the research does show that that distracts your mind and that you don't retain information, and the tasks statistically will take longer if you are multitasking than if you're trying to do just one thing. So I would encourage students to try to break. Activities into smaller chunks and do them one at a time, right?

[00:04:56] So spend a half an hour working on one thing and then take a break [00:05:00] and go do something else for five or 10 minutes and then come back and do it again. Rather than trying to do several things at once and getting distracted.

[00:05:09] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:05:09] I can definitely see that being a good strategy to implement. I'm definitely going to try that now.

[00:05:14] Moving forward, I know that you had some tips and tricks around, you know, study spaces and things like that and what to think about in relation to where you get your work done.

[00:05:26] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:05:26] Man, it's weird. All I'm the type of person I love to take a laptop and go sit in a coffee shop. Right. Or to go sit somewhere outside.

[00:05:36] I'm very used to being in community spaces while I am working. And I would imagine a lot of students are, are used to that as well, right? If you typically work in the library or in one of the coffee shops or, lounges in the dorms on campus, this is a big adjustment. This is a totally different experience.

[00:05:55] So being adaptable and thinking about ways that you can. [00:06:00] Trade your typical strategies for new versions that still maintain the integrity of the original strategy. Right. So for example, I like to study in communal spaces because I like being able to bounce ideas off of other people. That's, that's why I study in a coffee shop.

[00:06:18] That's why I like to work in a room with other folks. So creating virtual versions. Of that space, right? Doing video conferences, FaceTiming with a friend, pulling up Skype, maybe being a part of a group text or a group chat while you're all working on the same assignment. Those are great ways to build community and still have that way to bounce ideas.

[00:06:40] From one person to another, even if you're not physically in the same room. I also think about, I, I work pretty well under pressure. I love a deadline, and as we're moving into these online models are folks like me who are used to very clear structure. Suddenly there's all this freedom. So thinking about [00:07:00] a strategy for setting deadlines for yourself.

[00:07:03] Or even asking a friend, right? Find a buddy who can hold you accountable so that you still have some structure. Do you have specific strategies that you usually use that you're not able to, to do the same way at home right now?

[00:07:18] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:07:18] So. Just in terms of my daily routine. so I am, you know, at the Stamford campus, so I'm used to having a daily commute.

[00:07:27] And I know, you know, a lot of our students, they are commuting or they would be commuting every day. And I would always get reading done, say on the train. Right? So now I've had to be more proactive in terms of planning that into my day. So like for example, for students who might have been taken care of, some of the.

[00:07:46] Readings for our class while they were commuting to school. I think it's important to, you know, be intentional, intentional, and plan that time into your schedule. So like, this is when I will do my reading. so I think that would be one thing. [00:08:00] The what about now when we might be working in groups, but from a distance, what would you say are some things for students to keep in mind as they are completing group assignments and then, you know, an online format

[00:08:13] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:08:13] Year group assignments are challenging to begin with. Right. So I think maintaining this type of collaboration from a distance is really hard, but making sure not to procrastinate, I think is a big one. So if you're not seeing your group mate regularly, it's easy to forget that you're working on that project together. So

setting regular meetings or check-ins with each other as a team, I think is really important to build in that structured reminder and hold each other accountable.

[00:08:41] I think it also helps you to be empathetic about what work other folks are doing and what they need from you in order to be successful in doing it right. When you work on a team, if one person procrastinates and waits until the very last minute to get there, part of the project done. Everybody else. Is anxious [00:09:00] and waiting on that information and can't do what they need to do until it's finished.

[00:09:04] And I think especially now that you're not checking in in person, you're having to do everything remotely. Being really respectful of each other's time is, is critical. I also, as an instructor, I always like to push students. I think it's so tempting to be like, I'll write my portion of the assignment and I'll just send it to you the day before it's due and we'll combine everything.

[00:09:27] And that's our group project. Right. But that's not really collaboration. That's just delegation. So if you want to collaborate, making sure to schedule a video conferences so that you're talking to each other and matching strategies and sharing resources is, is much more helpful. And I would recommend using a video conference platform when you can, simply because you can see other folks, body language, their facial expressions, you can get a better idea of.

[00:09:57] If they're understanding what you're saying [00:10:00] or if they're comfortable with what you're suggesting right there just certain aspects of communication that are harder when you're trying to do everything through email or text. You don't get the same context. So setting regular meetings, being respectful of each other's time and, and video conferencing as, as groups, I think are always working remotely as a team can be more successful.

[00:10:24] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:10:24] Definitely. So, those are some, you know, tips and tricks for students to keep in mind in terms of how they're doing their work. but at UConn, you know, we have a lot of support systems that will continue to be in place, even though we are moving online. what would be some of those resources that students have available to them?

[00:10:42] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:10:42] The writing center is still open and operating remotely. So students can go on the writing centers website for instructions on how to schedule a virtual appointment or get feedback from a distance on their writing assignments. The Q center is also working remotely, [00:11:00] so if you go on the Q center's website, you can get more information about what options there are for virtual tutoring for a couple of the Q classes that are challenging for folks, even in person.

[00:11:10] So now that. I am. That's, that's a whole different ball game. So, the academic achievement center has a fantastic collection of resources for online learning that is linked on their website right now. So it's got an overview of strategies for online learning, but it also has links to resources for specific strategies.

[00:11:30] And I believe they're gonna make a lot of their. Workshops available virtually. So many of the workshops that they would typically do in person on campus, are now going to be available remotely. So taking advantage of those, the counseling center for students who are feeling anxious about adjusting to an online format or just anxious about the world at large.

[00:11:53] I know that I certainly am taking advantage of the counseling centers. Online telehealth option. [00:12:00] So an email was sent out to the UConn community a few days ago that outlined some details for that, but if you go to the counseling center's website, you can learn more about how to take advantage of that resource remotely.

[00:12:14] And there are lots of other offices that are doing virtual advising remotely as well. Right. So for academic advising, the office of undergraduate advising in the school of business is still doing virtual walk in hours for career coaching. The center for career development. And the business career development center are both doing virtual appointments and career coaching, resume review, all of that stuff.

[00:12:38] ISSS so international student support services is still doing virtual, both walk in and appointment based advising for international students who have questions about what their next steps should be. So I think just keeping in mind that that the UConn community has a really great. Team of folks in lots of different departments who are all trying to [00:13:00] make themselves available online, right? Just because you're working from home doesn't mean you're working alone. There are so many people who want to help. So just be proactive and reach out and ask for that help.

[00:13:12] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:13:12] And in terms of, you know, people, wanting to help you, professors are obviously a support system and now in classes are moving online and kind of tying back into our discussion about being organized. What are some questions you think students should be asking themselves as they're going over the syllabus for their classes and thinking about and making sense of all the changes?

[00:13:36] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:13:36] Big picture. Ask yourself, what information do I need in order to be successful. So our assignments changing. Do I know how they are changing? Are due dates changing? Do I know in the new due dates, are is the way that I turn an assignment in going to be on a different platform? If so, how am I turning that in? Do I [00:14:00] upload a document somewhere? Do I email it to the professor?

[00:14:03]and then just looking through to see what other changes there might be to certain policies. You know, I think it's, I think most students are operating under the assumption that the types of assignments they have are going to change a little bit. And the way that they're turning them in is probably gonna change.

[00:14:22] I haven't heard a lot of students asking questions about. How like grading policy or point value. So just when your professor sends you a new syllabus, read the whole thing. Yes. Ask yourself if there are policies that are changing in addition to assignments because as assignments change sometimes the ways.

[00:14:43] But they're, they're going to have to be graded or the ways that we're looking at whether or not a student has met the learning outcomes that that mindset changes. So just check to make sure that you're reading the whole thing and not just focusing on the due dates. Right. Look at the big picture. What sort of things do you think students [00:15:00] should be asking?

[00:15:00] Cause I think I'm looking at it from a very specific lens of the syllabus. What else should we be considering?

[00:15:08] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:15:08] Yeah, so I also teach philosophy at UConn. so one thing that I will be adding no to my class and, that other professors might be adding to is to bring that classroom discussion online. So there will be a discussion board.

[00:15:23]and obviously there will be, You know, guidelines for how to, to complete those assignments. But I think seeking out resources on how to write a good discussion post. And that might be, you know, asking your professor what their expectations are. Maybe they can provide you with an example or just, you know, expand on what they are looking for.

[00:15:43]so that will definitely be one thing I would encourage students to keep that in mind in terms of, you know, working in this new format. I think one important thing is to try and still build community with your classmates. So you know, you've worked with them for half of this semester [00:16:00] in person every week.

[00:16:01] So. Bringing that online could be a challenge. So what do you think would be some ways for students to do that? I know we had talked about maybe some different apps that students could use, which is something I will encourage my students to consider as well.

[00:16:18] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:16:18] Students are already using some of these resources even even as they're meeting in person. So I'm hoping the shift to online is a natural next step. So using group chat features. So whether it's like WhatsApp or group me, or even we chat. Those are all apps that allow for a group chat function. So you can put several members of a small group project into one chat or lots of people all in one classroom into one group chat.

[00:16:48]If professors are feeling excited about it, they can have the TAs manage the chat as well. So that's one way to. back and forth conversation that's consistent for answering quick questions, even when [00:17:00] you're not all in the same space. Obviously a shared Google doc is a tried method versioning information, and since students already have a Gmail account that's associated with the university, they've all got access to that platform.

[00:17:12] So you don't have to worry about whether one of your classmates has access to that resource. They do. Everybody's got Google suite. That's a great way to edit things in real time and be able to see the changes together. So I was thinking a lot about how I'm communicating, like with my colleagues at work.

[00:17:32] So making sure that you're not just talking about your classwork if you're trying to build community, right. Cause we're, I mean, you guys are business students. I think you're

trying to build a network as well. So, not just saying, Hey, do you, do you have that article that was assigned to us? Can you send the file to me?

[00:17:52] But Hey, how are you doing? Right. and, and having more of a, a conversation that. [00:18:00] Is focused on building relationships as people and just being really proactive and transparent during this time, communication is harder at a distance, but in some ways it's, it's easier to, right. It's not as scary to send a text message or an email as it is to walk up to a stranger. So take this as an opportunity to work up to more proactive relationship building with your colleagues.

[00:18:26] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:18:26] Definitely. And you know, for example, if your professor is recording video lectures, you know, watch the video lectures. You know, cop on to the group chat and maybe have a discussion, you know, run through the material with your classmates, have a conversation about what you're learning.

[00:18:44] Cause I think it's easy to just kind of step away from that, but just for you to maximize on this time and learn as much as you can. I definitely think that following up on like the videos you're watching or the readings you're doing and taking initiative. [00:19:00] And talking to your classmates is definitely a good way of doing that.

[00:19:03] But as we're wrapping up here, we also wanted to talk a little bit about self care. Cause you know, you and I both agree that scheduling that into your day's important now when things are teaching and your schedule is changing. So what are some things that you do, Ruth Elizabeth, for self care?

[00:19:25] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:19:25] Not sure I want to confess this on a path all of my students are going to listen to. But I, I am a gamer. I like video games. I like computer games. So, I'm making some weird adjustments cause typically myself care is like come home from work and maybe play my computer game for awhile. you know, log into steam, be with my community online there for, to unlock some achievements. Now I feel like I'm sitting in front of a computer all day because I'm working from home. so I'm not as eager to play on that platform. So my self care has [00:20:00] been exploring more video games and things like that so that I can move into a different room in my house and just, just do something that works my brain in a little bit of a different way. It's still still the same.

[00:20:12] So good.

[00:20:16]**Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:20:16] I've tried to read more fiction. I'm more of a nonfiction person, but I've challenged myself to read more fiction. So I'm planning that into my day every day. I was talking to my friend, she suggested that I. You know, just listen to more music now. And I have time cause like I would do that walking to the train.

[00:20:35] Right? But now when I'm not doing that, I'm not listening to music. So I've been spending some time on Spotify. People are like curating in a playlist and stuff that you can listen to. but then there are also like workout videos on YouTube that you could use. their guided meditation. I guess sessions on YouTube.

[00:20:53] So I would say do all those things. And I've also been trying to watch more movies, so that's definitely something, [00:21:00] that I've been spending time doing mostly in the evenings. But

[00:21:03] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:21:03] yeah, I've gotten, I've been really enjoying taking advantage of technology so that I can have like. Group, video chats with friends who live in other places.

[00:21:16]and, and in particular, it's, it's pretty easy to set up certain board games or like tabletop roleplay games. Like, I don't know if you play D and D, but you can totally do that through a video. and I, I would encourage. It's great just to feel connected to other people, to play games that way, with that face to face component.

[00:21:39] So I'm, I'm enjoying that a lot. Oh, you know what I learned yesterday? the, there's a trivia company that is doing online virtual, like. Pub trivia. so, so there are lots of things that are out there where if you want to feel connected to your community and, and take something that's normally in person and do it in a virtual space as a way of sort of self [00:22:00] care and relieving some of the stress and anxiety, it's, it's there.

[00:22:03] And. I'm trying to take advantage of it. Shine to make it a priority. Cause otherwise I think I will work too hard.

[00:22:11] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:22:11] Yes. Yes. So everyone listened to Ruth Elizabeth and plan some self care time. okay. So before we go, we both just wanted to, you know, remind you that. This will pass. It's temporary.

[00:22:25] Things will settle down. They will go back to normal. So, you know, just try and keep that in mind as you're settling into this new time period in your life. Thank you so much, Ruth Elizabeth for answering all our questions. Anything else that you want to say before we go?

[00:22:43] **Ruth Elizabeth Morris:** [00:22:43] I just want to thank you so much for having me and for continuing to produce these podcasts.

[00:22:48] I think this is just such a great way for students to hear how the team at at UConn is working to support them and also for us to hear from them. Right. If you're listening to this [00:23:00] podcast and you have more suggestions for online resources that you want to share for other students, getting in contact with Emma is a great way to share them.

[00:23:08] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:23:08] Definitely.

[00:23:18] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:23:18] That was great. Emma, some really important and helpful information for students. What were your main takeaways?

[00:23:25] **Emma Bjorngard-Basayne:** [00:23:25] I will say that my main takeaways from the episode, the first thing was to have a calendar. use your Google calendar and just to make sure that you have a good structure going for your week.

[00:23:38] Some other, important points that she made, I feel like was in relation to the different resources that we have online now. So, you know, use the writing center, the Q center, the academic achievement center. They are going to have virtual workshops. and you can talk to the career development office if you have questions.

[00:23:56]so I would say those would be my, my main takeaways. Take [00:24:00] advantage of their resources that are there.

[00:24:01] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:24:01] Great. Thank you so much. Thank you to Ruth, Elizabeth for joining us with this really important conversation.