Supervising Students Remotely

Students are learning professional development skills, and your job can be incredibly important to their development. Do not assume students know what is expected of them as they shift to the virtual remote work environment. Working remotely is a great way to open up discussions with your staff and help highlight some new skill development and career competencies they are gaining in response to this situation. This could include adaptability, flexibility, creative problem solving, resilience and other skills that are important in the workplace. Their experiences in your job, as well as this semester, will lead to important leadership development. Here are just some quick tips as you help them navigate this new online world:

Provide Structure & Timelines

Be sure to provide some guidelines, timelines, parameters for their work. Discuss with them what supervised professional remote work involves.

Create a work schedule with an agreed upon days and times of work. *Be mindful of time zones in case any students are working from a different location than Iowa.*

Outline the tasks and work that the student will do during these times, with clear due dates.

Be flexible and adaptable. Productivity may look different than when students were working in your space.

Have Clear Expectations

Share expectations for dress and timeliness. This includes "showing up" for work dressed appropriately and looking professional (i.e. hair brushed, clothing neat) in the virtual work environment just like they do for their regular work.

Set smaller, manageable deliverables, rather than large projects that may not need much oversight. Smaller goals provide more chances to collaborate and ensure progress is being made.

Respect other potential schedule challenges for students. Set deadlines that make sense for the project and the student. *Remember that some students may be working from home with children, spouses, families, or others that need support.*

Set a plan for providing (and getting) feedback. We are all learning how to operate in a partially remote campus, so allow for open communication regarding performance feedback.

Create a Communication Plan

Try to maintain a similar check-in/meeting schedule as if this were in-person. Maintaining contact and interactions can be helpful not only for productivity, but for morale and social support. *Remember, this year will look very different than the student anticipated, so helping them continue to make connections on campus will be crucial to their experience.*

Discuss how the student will check-in and check-out with you and be available to you during their scheduled work time.

Agree on how students will document their tasks during the time they are working or to send a summary of the work completed during the time they are working.
Make sure the student knows how to contact you during their work time.

Provide Resources, As Needed

Ask what resources and support are needed to work remotely.

Know where to go for help! (Use IT's resources!)

Be a support for them, not just about work. Even a general question such as "How is this remote work situation working out for you so far?" can elicit important information that you might not otherwise hear. Let the student's stress or concerns (rather than your own) be the focus of this conversation.

Know where students can go if they are feeling anxious or stressed.
(https://counseling.uiowa.edu/)

Make it fun!

Working from home can be lonely (especially if students are also doing most classes and extracurriculars online as well). Work in some fun activities in staff meetings or 1:1 check-ins. (See next section for fun activities & games via Zoom)

Research on emotional intelligence and emotional contagion tells us that employees look to their managers for cues about how to react to sudden changes or crisis situations. If a manager communicates stress and helplessness, this will have a "trickle-down" effect on employees. Effective leaders take a two-pronged approach, both acknowledging the stress and anxiety that employees may be feeling in difficult circumstances, but also providing affirmation of their confidence in their teams, using phrases such as "we've got this," or "this is tough, but I know we can handle it," or "let's look for ways to use our strengths during this time." With this support, employees are more likely to take up the challenge with a sense of purpose and focus.

Resources:
Gallaudet University-Tips for Supervising Student Workers Remotely

University of Calgary – Guidelines for Effective Remote Supervision

Harvard Business Review – A Guide to Managing Your (Newly) Remote Workers

Make it Fun!
Zoom Activities & Games

A study by Remote.co found that, "87% of remote workers feel more connected through the use of video conferencing." So if you have the opportunity to use video alongside your team building efforts and icebreaker games – grab it!

Here are just a few suggested activities & games that you could incorporate into meetings.

Show & Tell

Ask the students to prepare one item to share with the team that represents something important to them. They will show the item on video and share a bit about why it is important to them.

Online Team-Building Activity—Lost at Sea

This is a classic activity, that can be done virtually! Here's more information about the activity, as well as the downloadable activity packet. To make this work with your team, send them the packet (without the answer key) at the beginning of your meeting. Individually, they will rank the items as they deem important. As a group, have them work through the scenario, ranking the items together. This can lead to great discussions about teamwork, as well as learning about one another.

Personal Facts Guessing Game

1. Prior to the meeting, ask each team member to share some personal facts with them.
2. Compile these facts into a document in random order. Next to each personal fact there's an empty column for guessing which employee the fact belongs to.
3. During the meeting, share your screen with the compiled document and altogether work through the who's who game.

You can also adapt the common "Two Truths & A Lie" to a virtual icebreaker similar to this.

Zoom Background Fun

Prior to the meeting, ask each person to upload a specific Zoom background. Then, in the beginning of the meeting, have each person go around and talk about why they chose that background. Some topics could be:
- Dream vacation
- Favorite animal
- Favorite activity (work appropriate, of course)
- Hobby, etc. etc.

Something in Common, Something Different

This is a spin on a classic get-to-know-you game.

1. Randomly pair your team up into breakout rooms. (You are able to randomly assign breakout rooms so that there are 2 people to a room.)
2. Ask each pair to identify:
   a. 5 things they have in common (they must be more creative than "Go to UI," "Work together" etc.
   b. 3 ways in which they are completely different
3. Share out!

Choose Your Favorite

This can be done quickly before each meeting. Select a topic for students to think about before the meeting, and they will all share their favorite. Examples could include:
- Netflix show/movie
- Song
- Place
- Coffee shop
- Restaurant
- Color
- Food, etc. etc.

You could take turns each week with who determines what the 'favorite' item is. That would get students engaged, excited to share, etc. It's a great way to make the meeting fun, doesn't take much time, and gets everyone involved.

There are so many others out there! Hopefully these help give an idea of how to spice up a meeting. Though you may not have chosen to do something like this prior to going virtual, remember that in this time of virtual class, activities, and work, we all may need to work a little harder to connect and help students get the most out of their campus experiences!