

Mentoring in Higher Education during COVID-19 Pandemic



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The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has instigated challenges in Higher Education institutes that required immediate responses to the sudden closures of colleges and universities, out casting faculty members as well as students.

The spread of the coronavirus has caused drastic disruption to face-to-face instruction, forcing universities across the world to transform the teaching/learning process into 100% online-instruction. With big applause, universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain among others worldwide have managed in no time to move all faculty members and students to the online frontier, utilizing varied electronic platforms. Universities, being aware of the situation, have planned carefully the transformation phase and provided massive workshops to assist faculty members to effectively use online-classes for instruction and implement a variety of assessment types, techniques and tools.

As much as it can be said about universities' success moving to online-instruction and maintaining quality standards of educational instruction, additional concerns should arise about the effect of such transformation on faculty as well as students' performance and mental health. Many studies were conducted to measure the impact of the online-instruction from the instructors and students' perspectives regarding fact-finding outcomes related to the types of platforms used, the number of on-line instruction, types of assessments, percentages and so on; however, none has been done on instructors and students' mental health.

As the coronavirus spreads, thousands of faculty and students have found themselves in a real struggle to cope with the unprecedented changes that have taken place in an accelerated manner. Some have definitely coped with such changes and have stepped up to ensure that learning continues, while others have been crumpled, struggling deeply not only academically but also mentally. Those mental struggles have sprung out from the fear of not being able to deal with the rapid technological advances, phobic of sitting behind rigid screens, fear of lack of real human communication, fear of failure in courses; leaving all at risk.

Strenuous efforts have been exerted to support students; however, they remain considerable on a small scale, where the majority have found themselves lost in a vacuum. Much has been done regarding registration of courses, solving internet connectivity, grading systems, tips and resources; yet, little has been done to cater for individuals' concerns about distress, adapting to the unprecedented changes, feelings of isolation, distant communication means, moments of insecurity; all of which resulted in ending up with muted voices behind the screens.

Mentoring during crisis should be enforced and practised to create a healthier environment where faculty mentor students. Under these disruptive circumstances, mentoring can be implemented remotely helping one another work through major adjustments in their lives. Numerous studies have proved the vitality of enforcing mentorship programmes in higher education setting in western universities. Reading about the positive outcomes from such programmes should encourage Higher Education institutions to start immediate action-plans and launch mentoring programmes in our beloved country.

To optimize mentoring in Higher Education, universities should establish mentoring programme units with clear schemes that aim at providing training sessions, workshops, seminars, consultations and guidelines for faculty to be qualified to start supporting students as well as other faculty during uncertain times where psychological distress heightens. The reassuring and supportive language that reflects the understanding of the human's needs on a regular basis should be employed.

With the right training, setting up frameworks that include goals and expectations should also be established to assist both faculty and students to define their priorities and gear them towards accomplishing these goals. In like manner, faculty should be encouraged to take up the roles of mentors to support students especially those who feel disconnected. It is wise to start small and gradual as one of the reasons that faced faculty with their students is poor communication due to setting up high expectations and demands. This might trigger negative emotional reactions in both faculty and students. Therefore, faculty should take the roles of a mentor in terms of offering understanding, gradual expectations, regular communication, collaboration, listening attentively, and sharing.

Virtual interactions, regular meetings and follow-ups should also be enhanced to share experiences with students on how to achieve their goals using reassuring language to ease their concerns and support them mentally and academically to wipe away distressful moments. It is healthy to express mutual feelings and worries and on the top of that is important to have constructive talks using empathetic language.

Using different platforms, e.g., Zoom, Teams, Blackboard, Email, WhatsApp, etc., faculty should plan carefully a schedule of individual or group mentoring sessions with students, on regular basis, to brief them on their progress and discuss solutions for obstacles that might hinder their academic performance. This would reassure students' confidence and self-efficacy. Further to this, sessions can be directed towards student-to-student mentoring so they can stay connected and form sub-groups to support one another.

Mentorship can be an invaluable investment in faculty and student success in Higher Education that help educators achieve greatness. Therefore, mentoring programmes should be established in universities as a cultivated culture to nurture the Bahraini Higher Education environment.

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Another celestial dance

But in Bahrain, it will not be visible

When? This Sunday

The season of lunar and solar eclipses has ended for Bahrain, says Astronomer researcher Ali Majeed Al-Hajri

TDT | Manama

The universe, soon after mesmerising skywatchers across the world with two spectacular shows, is giving us yet another chance to witness the celestial dance.

According to experts, a "penumbral eclipse" will briefly appear in some parts across the world this Sunday.

The spectacle, however, will not be visible in Bahrain, this time, says Astronomer researcher Ali Majeed Al-Hajri.

According to him, Bahrain will not witness a full phenomenon before 7 September 2025 when the world will experience a 'total lunar eclipse'.

Sunday's event, the third such this year, would be visible only in parts of North and South America and Europe and in the Western parts of Africa.

Ali Al Hajri told ALAayam that the penumbral lunar eclipse will start at around 06:07 am and will go on till 08:52 am. The maximum eclipse will be at 07:29 am.

It will last for approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes and will not appear much different from the regular moon to the naked eye.

However, it will not be visible from Bahrain as it is taking place during the day time.

Timeanddate says the next eclipse, a penumbral Lunar eclipse, visible in Manama will happen on 16 May 2022. This will be followed by a partial solar eclipse on 25 October 2022 and a Penumbral Lunar Eclipse on 8 November 2022.



Astronomer researcher Ali Majeed Al-Hajri. (Courtesy of ALAayam)

Bahrainis will have to wait until October 2023 to witness a Partial lunar eclipse from Manama, and then a year more to witness it again on 18 September 2024.

In total, until the total lunar eclipse of 20 December 2029, Bahrain will witness about 15 celestial events in the form of total and

partial events.

However, if you aren't out there in person to witness any one of these events, you can take in the spectacular show online.

This Sunday's event is an annular one, in which the moon does not completely cover the sun as it passes between the star and Earth.



How many lunar eclipses will there be in 2020?

4 lunar eclipses

Year 2020 has 6 eclipses, 2 solar eclipses and 4 lunar eclipses.

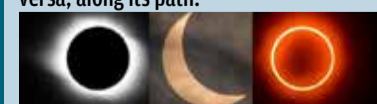
Four type of Solar Eclipse

There are four types of solar eclipses: total, partial, annual and hybrid. Total solar eclipses happen when the sun is completely blocked by the moon. Total solar eclipses are only visible from a specific part of the Earth.



Hybrid Solar Eclipses

A hybrid solar eclipse is a rare form of solar eclipse, which changes from an annular to a total solar eclipse, and vice versa, along its path.



The last Penumbral lunar eclipse of this year will take place on 29-30 November.