

# **“Tips and Tricks” for Online Courses**

(Collected from Spring 2020 Faculty Survey)

## **Sections**

|                                       |       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| I. Communication                      | p. 2  |
| II. Personal Interaction              | p. 3  |
| III. Synchronous/Asynchronous Meeting | p. 4  |
| IV. Discussion                        | p. 5  |
| V. Assessment                         | p. 6  |
| VI. Content and Coursework            | p. 7  |
| VII. Engagement                       | p. 10 |
| VIII. Seeking Advice                  | p. 12 |

## Communication

- Timely replies to student emails lowered their anxiety and frustration.
- Although I gave my lectures in Blackboard Collaborate synchronously, I wish I could have seen the students like you do in Zoom. I felt it challenging to feel like they were still there.
- Be clear about technology with students, hold virtual office hours, and allow students time to really talk about how they are doing.
- Communication with students is key. Though I have never been the best about instant email replies, I tried much harder after the break because of the new constraints, and I had multiple students thank me for replying promptly to emails. They also seemed to appreciate weekly reminders about upcoming work as well as individualized help on projects.
- Google forms was helpful to get information from students that did not require a grade/assignment.
- I frequently used poll-maker.com to ask questions that could help me gauge where students needed the most assistance without necessarily identifying which students said what (sometimes you get more honest responses with anonymity).
- I simply recommend that at the beginning of each online course, faculty intentionally orient students to a consistent place for them to get course information and updates, so that there is no excuse for not knowing.
- I was able to go essentially paperless and respond to assessments and written assignments over the online platform rather than dealing with physical papers.
- It helped to be organized. I communicated with the class prior to each class section via email. The students were aware of the goals for each class meeting.
- One thing I note is that a collaborative tool/app such as Slack is helpful in staying in touch with students who are online. Some in CEMB have discouraged the use of this kind of tool, but it needs to be a component if we have to continue online education in the future. I don't find anything on Blackboard to be as useful.
- It seems helpful to take breaks each hour or so, just as you might in a classroom setting.
- Provide a scheduled weekly time for questions, discussion and reassurance. Don't email students every day!
- Students are more likely to attend if class is held at the scheduled time. Interaction with students over Blackboard Collaborate with video keeps that student/professor relationship strong.

## Personal Interaction

- Be flexible and encouraging as not all adapt easily to a new format.
- Be realistic about expectations.
- Record lectures with your face visible (students commented that they felt a connection to me through this small change to my online lectures).
- Show grace but keep expectations and rigor high.
- It seemed important for the student to see me face to face online. It helped the student express their thoughts and feelings about the online experience and work load. It also helped me keep up with each student's progress with less e-mails in a more personal way.
- Make sure you are approachable to students even off line
- I do think that I had a good online experience because I came into it with 8 weeks of in-person instruction--I knew my students well and so was able to re-tool the classes knowing what they could and couldn't handle.
- Create office hours in Timetrade linked to Zoom, post meeting link in Blackboard. Students used this opportunity for clarification and personal direction.
- If the class is small enough, meeting with each student via Collaborate or FaceTime at the beginning of the semester might be beneficial. It can be a quick 10-15 conversation to at least put a face with a name, and gives the student the opportunity to "meet" the professor and vice versa. It also allows the student one-on-one time with the professor for a few minutes, instead of being on a big Collaborate or Zoom meeting.
- I scheduled one-on-one video meetings with students. This was very helpful in working through their final project as well as getting a feel for how they were handling the "stay-at-home" situation. Some were alone in apartments while some were with family. These meetings really helped in their connection level.
- In order to make sure the students still felt some personal connection, I e-mailed them individually with updates and information. It took time, but I believe it made them feel as though there was more than a "virtual" connection with the instructor
- Lot of emails and connecting with students frequently. Showing students that I care about their success.
- You must continuously over-communicate with students in the online format. You must stay connected with each student to indicate you are genuinely interested in the students doing well as well as their health & safety.

## Synchronous/Asynchronous Meeting

- Maintaining a synchronous format defeats one of the primary reasons for virtual classes. The evidence mounts that Zoom and similar formats create unnecessary stress when used extensively. When students and professors have clear expectations about teaching in an asynchronous format, it opens up wonderful opportunities for mutual learning and tends to give those who feel awkward being on screen or speaking in a classroom a chance to flourish and improve their critical thinking and writing skills.
- Asynchronous learning is narrow in its effectiveness, but quite useful for certain circumstances; this style of learning is probably under-used in a typical academic setting, and I might try to incorporate it more in the future.
- Having asynchronous materials that reinforce content delivered synchronously is good.
- Collaborate is not optimal for virtual class meetings
- Collaborate is not effective as an online synchronous course delivery tool for a class with more than 8 students, i.e. any class at Belmont.
- Finally, I offered both required synchronous and not required synchronous class meetings to give students extra help if they needed it but not if they felt overwhelmed.
- I recorded my lectures and make it available to the class (Asynchronous learning). I followed it up by having a live online session during the regular class time (Synchronous learning). The live session is used for having class discussions and also doing class activity.
- Providing recorded lectures allowed students to move through the material at a pace that maximized their learning. It was important to have an opportunity for live questions and answers after students digested the material.
- Students liked synchronous sessions better than just posted materials.
- Synchronous lessons definitely work better than asynchronous to address student needs better
- There is a good deal of information out there that says long synchronous lectures simply don't work especially for large groups. Lots of my colleagues so this as an opportunity to provide the same thing only live online. The feed back from my advisees was brutal.
- zoom classes were most effective if prepping for major assignment, not just covering material, asynchronous video was better for covering material

## Discussion

- Mute your microphone and do not use the camera unless you're doing a screen share. Students can raise her hands and collaborate and activate the mic when they wish to speak.
- Breakout rooms for small group discussions are key. I use Zoom for synchronous class meetings, and you can utilize their Whiteboard for students to share their small group conclusions when they return to the main room. It functions as seamlessly as in the classroom. The Whiteboard is also helpful to do quick polls - Agree column and Disagree column and have students mark a tally mark under the column that represents them. It can help to utilize the Chat for more complex answers instead of the Whiteboard.
- Having a weekly (or per module) General Discussion Board as a place to ask/answer assignment-related questions is very helpful to the class as a whole [and lessens instructor time spent answering repetitive questions via email].
- For synchronous meetings - posting discussion questions in chat helps them gather their thoughts prior to response better than restating the question(s) frequently.
- Assigning peer-editing sub-groups using discussion boards worked way better than in-class (except for the one or two students who didn't participate). Students had a draft upload date, a comment by date and then a day to review/refine/revise before uploading for me.
- I found that GroupMe or another group messaging program is effective for most students in communicating with the class. Since it works as an app on their cell phones or via text message, it allows for announcements, discussions, polls, etc. in real time similar to texting with emojis, gifs, etc, as well as private messaging. It doesn't take the place of email or blackboard for detailed directions, but it allows the students to express themselves in a way that keeps the class connected.
- It seems to take a bit longer for students to respond to a question posed to the class.
- Each week during online learning I created a board for each class day but they had all week (until Friday at midnight) to respond to any of the threads. I interacted on each board every day. This seemed to promote a little more dialogue and engagement.

## Assessment

- Students appreciated that some of the written assignments got replaced by application-based assignments that made use of a multiple-choice format for grading.
- Blackboard Collaborate was useful for attendance.
- Able to monitor students during assessments using Zoom while still requiring lockdown browser. Required more proctors due to number of pages and need to watch very closely.
- Assessing conceptual skills rather than technical skills leaves less room for academic dishonesty.
- Building practice assessments so that students get to practice the process of taking an online assessment is good (especially for timed assessments or assessments that can be taken only once).
- Gradescope is a fantastic online grading platform.
- Exams are the hardest. Didn't ultimately give a timed exam (problem sets instead). This went moderately well but I have serious integrity concerns. I'm considering oral exams if remote learning is required in the future.
- I really dislike grading, but daily fact sheets about the reading and listening have been very helpful.
- One set of assignments were quizzes on Blackboard that were open-book. The point was not to see if they memorized the work. The quizzes functioned as homework and to see if they had done the reading, and then it was graded by Blackboard, so I did not need to grade their homework.
- Keep new assignments to a minimum.
- Setting tests up in Blackboard is efficient and good evaluation of student knowledge quickly.
- The Blackboard Peer Assessment Tool was tricky to set up but worked really well for peer review of work.
- There are several sites that assist in formatting and developing Blackboard test questions, such as <https://resources.online.nwtc.edu/blackboard/test-generator/>

## Content and Coursework

- Try to incorporate current issues and articles to discuss on the front of class before you working to your lecture content.
- Go slower than you normally do and explain things clearly. Ask for questions every couple of minutes.
- A second video screen was extremely useful when giving content in Blackboard Collaborate with PowerPoint. Otherwise you couldn't see questions in chat or hands raised during the presentation.
- Recorded synchronous in both Panopto and Blackboard Collaborate to ensure there was back up (particularly important when I first started).
- Blackboard and YouTube were extremely helpful in getting information to/from students.
- Digital drawing tablets (Wacom is a popular brand) are GREAT.
- Dual Monitors, breakout rooms on collaborate, touchscreen/stylus whiteboard on collaborate
- Guest speakers via teleconference are very successful.
- I tried to create assignments for songwriting that involved social media platforms for performance, zoom co-writing and also assignments on writing inspired by their surrounding. I enjoyed the challenge.
- I use Ed Puzzle which is very easy and students loved it!
- I used Collaborate for whole-class meetings and breakout rooms. One class included completion of a very significant team assignment and my students reported that it worked much better on Collaborate than groups typically do in-person. This may also be a function of having to stay at home with little else to do....but they reported strong attendance at team meetings and less b.s. in their discussions. They claim to have been more focused on getting the work done than in face-to-face groups. The quality of their assignments suggest that this was true.
- I used Flipgrid to modify delivery of content that would usually be delivered as a panel discussion. Presenters recorded 5 minute videos of the content they wished to share. The Flipgrid allowed more presenters to participate and allowed students to customize their learning experience by watching the videos that most interested them. I didn't have students and presenters engage in back and forth like we would in an in-person panel, but that is possible in Flipgrid.
- Make sure you adopt textbooks that have a GOOD online learning platform as a supplement to teaching. This is helpful when students have personal medical issues that can't attend, but also during the pandemic for sure! I was already able to transition with some of my texts, but others not so much. Luckily, I had already typed outlines and examples for blackboard.

- Make the videos in small chunks. Also, make videos for the extra instructional material or how to complete assignments, etc. Provide extra email reminders about exams, assignment due dates and leave assignments open for longer.
- Many students liked that my lectures were available through Panopto, as they could re-watch them. They seem to be much more time-consuming than regular "lectures" though.
- Panopto was very easy to use and gave me flexibility for asynchronous teaching.
- I recommend Zoom over Bb Collaborate. With Zoom NO issues with Audio/Video on either end. Students preferred Zoom.
- Record your online meetings. Blackboard will post them automatically and students who missed the meeting can watch. Use earbuds/headphones in meetings--it helps with the audio.
- Recording an audio interview (not lecture) was one technique I used. I paired the lecture with a few powerpoint slides, and then had a quiz students were allowed to take open note--essentially they filled the quiz out while they listened to me conversing with the guest speaker, and it acted as a check to be sure they listened.
- Slack makes it very easy to mix group and one-on-one messaging.  
Multiple students can ask questions privately. You can, on the fly, decide whether to answer them privately, or to share their question anonymously and respond to the group.
- Some browsers work better than others - I tend to use Firefox.
- Students and faculty need to have word or products that sync.
- The group function of Blackboard/Collaborate worked very well. It enabled me to enter each group's room and speak with them individually and see their faces.
- Think about how long an activity will take and add 25%. Delays in student responses while on line take more time than you think
- Turning Point audience response system can be used asynchronous online classes to increase engagement and assess understanding. The university should purchase a license.
- The group chat in Collaborate is a very useful tool to get feedback without having to interrupt the presenter. A group chat tool can be used for asynchronous online delivery of courses along with on campus, in person.
- The Wacom One drawing tablet is an excellent tool to offer a shared whiteboard screen, the tablet replicates the whiteboard in the classroom, the pages can be saved and distributed. The tablet can be used to highlight within documents being presented and write on top of presented documents to help with emphasis.
- Use discord for community building! Consider flipped classroom, make use of youtube and other lecture materials, in addition to Panopto. Use Kanopy for video lectures.
- Use Zoom, it worked very well for many of our needs.



- Using Slack is a great intermediary between email and BB that allows for group messaging board but also direct messages and direct uploads (audio, video, document files).
- We had few were peer to peer collaboration connectivity issues when we used zoom instead of collaborate. Also, my student groups pre-recorded their final presentations over their PowerPoint slides and then presented them to their community partners over Zoom. We had no connectivity issues and their final presentations went over without a hitch.
- Zoom Video is excellent. I am disappointed with the quality of Blackboard videos. Can we all get accounts through the school so that we can have as many students as needed and not have to pay the annual fee?
- Zoom worked well if you know how to use it. With a stable internet service and good knowledge of Zoom I can have a class on zoom that is just as effective as in person.
- Zoom works better than BB Collaborate
- Zoom, Blackboard collaborate (and the chat features in both zoom and collaborate) were great in terms of engagement and discussion. Perusall is an awesome tool for breaking down readings and allowing students to comment within an article or textbook.
- I added YouTube videos and blackboard discussion boards. I also encouraged student-produced podcasts, videos, and songs for final projects.
- Virtual office hours – zoom and facetime were great for the students. This is not my thing usually (I didn't grow up with it like they did), but covid-19 forced us into it. I will continue this method of office hours for future as well, as the more reserved students and students with learning disabilities really took advantage of it. Also, with virtual office hours, they don't have the excuses of "I'm across campus and can't make it" when you ask to meet.

## Engagement

- Students liked the incremental assessments that kept them engaged and help them “master” the main concepts that were encapsulated in a class project.
- The videos that had a deliverable (e.g., follow-the-instructor activity, quiz) had a much higher viewership rate than did the video lectures that did not have a deliverable to submit.
- A weekly email that spelled out all course-related activities helped keep students informed and engaged.
- Maintaining high expectations for students helped keep them focused on producing quality deliverables.
- A big weekly class presentation format with links to material and plenty of embedded questions throughout for students to get engaged with
- Post answered and comments on the class discussion forum/board as part of their class participation grade
- A combo of virtual classes and discussion boards seemed to work fairly well.
- Turning Point was useful to make sure the students were engaged during synchronous lectures. The use of polls in Blackboard Collaborate was too cumbersome and not flexible.
- As someone who has always taught online classes, I've learned that an organized blackboard, a fully detailed class calendar, and consistency and quick-email-returns are what students are expecting and need in online classes.
- Building in redundancy is good (multiple avenues to access material, multiple reminders).
- It is ESSENTIAL to maintain some level of scheduled interactivity to keep students engaged in the course and invested in collaborative learning.
- FlipGrid is a good engagement platform
- I always had an optional "first of the week" check in on Collaborate; and I always recorded it for later viewing. There I would explain what the student should have completed, as well as what they should be tackling that week.
- I did not lower my expectations of students and I found they were very appreciative. They are driven and we still made enormous progress during this challenging time.
- I used YouTube lectures (short ones) accompanied by required quizzes on Blackboard that were each three questions long to make sure students watched the videos - that seemed to help with engagement.
- I found, to my surprise, that many of the students preferred the synchronous instruction (with recordings if they can't make it) using Collaborate. It made them feel more connected as a class and provided more structure to their learning. I'm not sure if that would be the case if my courses started online.

- I had a 10 point quiz open for 24 hours after the class time would have ended were we still on campus. I did so to stay aligned as closely as possible with the syllabus and to ensure student engagement at a classroom pace.
- There is the need for instructors to adopt both asynchronous and synchronous learning. Using only asynchronous learning would lead to greater student disaffection toward online learning.
- I gave a lot of youtube clips to view and report on with a short followup paper on what they had learned.
- Making class video calls mandatory with specific requirements to be completed in advance and clear expectations of what would be discussed were helpful to encourage attendance and participation. In the future, I will record sessions if I have an absence, but did not do that this spring.
- Most students struggled keeping up with due dates and time management. I sent an email to every class on Monday morning outlining the week in the course. I received a lot of positive feedback for this.
- Require some, but not all virtual meetings. The non-required meetings had poor attendance and I fear these students felt disconnected from me and the course. Having periodic required meetings is important. However, making some meetings optional was also helpful to students that were overwhelmed with assignments/meetings in other courses/experiencing personal challenges. It allowed some additional margin and autonomy for these students to take responsibility for their own learning experience.
- Linking attendance points to viewer reports available induces students to watch recorded sessions.
- Well-designed discussions and other collaborative assignments actually serve introverted/shy students better than face-to-face classrooms.
- When teaching Music Lessons on Zoom, it's important to go to the arrow next to the microphone icon and open the menu, select Audio Settings and then select Advanced Setting. Then, disable the first two settings that mute intermittent and continuous background noise. Zoom was designed for Conferences so it hears music and accompaniment as noise and mutes it. Not a good thing at all!
- You can never over prepare for instruction, particularly when it is done online.
- Zoom is much better than Bb Collaborate. You can see all your students at once. Bb only allowed 4 students to be viewed, so they were not trying very hard to be present.

### Seeking Advice

- Geoff Price and Chris Raines were fabulous! Great job, fellows!
- I frequently lurked on Geoff Price and Chris Raines' office hours to get help with the technology.
- The library can help faculty find ebooks, streaming media, and other resources to use for online teaching. We have a LibGuide with more info, <https://belmont.libguides.com/online>, and also encourage faculty to reach out for help.
- Work with your library faculty to get access to course materials. We have lots of resources available electronically!