OUE Pivot Project | Tips and Recommendations for Teaching Remotely

GENERAL GUIDANCE

Approximately 200 emails were received in response to Dean of Undergraduate Education Amanda Claybaugh's request for the names of instructors or TFs who did exceptional work during the Spring 2020 semester. Most commonly in these messages, students praised instructors' and TFs' **empathy, availability, responsiveness, flexibility, preparation, and openness to feedback.** Features or characteristics included:

- Underscoring the unprecedented moment in which we are living, learning, and teaching
- Making efforts to understand each student's unique learning situation—e.g., where they are located, what potential stressors or barriers to learning might exist
- Expressing concern for students' well-being in light of new stressors added since the outbreak of COVID-19 and the resulting switch to remote learning
- Checking in on students—e.g., email outreach, more frequent office hours; one-on-one meetings with students; offering space during class time for students, instructors, and TFs to talk about how they are feeling or to provide updates about themselves
- Responding to student messages in a timely manner
- Increasing availability for meetings, calls, and check-ins—e.g., by sharing a calendar, accommodating various time zones
- Reworking assignments, exams, projects, expectations around participation, and structural elements of the course to better fit the remote learning environment
- Preparing ahead of time and informing students of the format/agenda for each class, and thoroughly explaining readings/assignments/learning objectives
- Informing oneself of online-learning pedagogy and best practices
- Tailoring individual assessments to a student's circumstances—e.g., personalized paper/project timelines
- Flexible deadlines or easily accommodating requests for extensions
- Regularly soliciting student feedback to adapt the course throughout the term, as needed
- Connecting course content to real-world issues related to COVID-19
- Introducing light-heartedness or levity into courses when appropriate—e.g., funny hats, humor, dance parties, singing

GUIDANCE BY TYPE OF COURSE

Guidance from one type of course may be applicable or adaptable to other types of courses. In some instances, instructors and TFs may consider using certain aspects simultaneously (e.g., concurrently using breakout rooms and Google Docs/Slides for group work). Students often commented on the ways instructors changed assignments (especially final exams/papers/projects) to meet the remote environment (e.g., group presentations or an hour-long individualized conversation, as opposed to a paper or exam).

Lectures (including those with music/performance, lab, and p-set components)

- **Flipped classrooms/Asynchronous videos:** Students commented on the success of some lecture courses in which instructors created videos for students to watch on their own time. Ungraded quizzes were sometimes used for accountability. Students also commented on instructors using videos to reinforce course concepts and review material. As a result of moving lecture or direct instruction away from the group space, synchronous course meetings were then more discussion-based or participatory, and some lectures even broke into smaller sections to sustain engagement.
- **Breakout rooms:** Students appreciated the use of breakout rooms, which offered them the opportunity to meet other students (as they might in a physical classroom space) and engage with questions, ideas, and practice problems in a deeper and more interactive way. One class even used breakout rooms to engage in a simulation exercise that would have been difficult in-person. Having smaller breakout rooms report back to the larger classroom was also noted by students as a good way of increasing participation. Previewing (or reviewing) material via video gave some students ways to gauge their understanding.
- **Virtual communities:** Some courses used Slack to build a virtual classroom community and to offer students an easy way to contact instructors, TFs, and each other.
- **Zoom tools and features:** Students commented on innovative uses of Zoom's polling, reaction, and chat features. Screen sharing also offers opportunities for real-time demonstrations (e.g., coding or visualizing data, using online tools).
- **Live documents/assignments:** Students also commented on the use of "live" Google Docs/Slides to participate in real-time group work.
- **Virtual "chalkboards":** Students commented on the use of tablets or the Zoom annotation tool to replicate a chalkboard/whiteboard, showing students how to work out problems in real time. Others used document cameras as a way to show work or explain concepts.
- **Self-pacing:** Zoom and other online platforms may offer students the ability to work at their own pace or work on problems of particular interest to them. For instance, one course used breakout rooms for specific p-set problems during office hours, so students could work together on the same problems that were giving them trouble.
- **Utilizing additional content/resources:** The switch to online instruction allowed some courses to invite guest speakers who may not have been able to join courses on campus. Additionally, other courses used photos, videos, databases, and other virtual content to supplement classroom activities or lectures.
- **Adapting music/performance classrooms:** One music course transformed a rhythmic variations exercise into a music video by having students send in video clips that the instructor stitched together. In another course, students were still able to view performances of plays via viewings arranged by the instructor.
- **Synchronous classroom experiences:** Students still value real-time class experiences. For instance, in a music course that examined the musical score for *The Lord of the Rings* the instructor scheduled a synchronous classroom viewing of one of the films—and she even mailed students snack boxes!

- **Incorporating labs:** Students commented on several ways instructors adapted lab components. For example, in a robotics course, the instructors and TFs tested several simulators to replicate programming robots in the real world. In a biology course, a TF set up a website to simulate the lab experience. In another lab- and fieldwork-based course, instructors used an online birds database combined with guided group activities to explore resources during lab sessions.
- **P-Set format:** Students found it helpful to have instructors and TFs make themselves available for one-on-one meetings or regular office hours for working through individual questions on p-sets. One student commented that the office hours for their course had separate breakout rooms for each problem being discussed. Students also commented that changing the format of p-sets (e.g., from graded to completion) was helpful in reducing stress.

Seminars, Sections, Tutorials

Please note: we grouped together feedback for smaller, discussion based course components due to their structural/instructional similarities.

- **Live documents/assignments:** Students also commented on the use of "live" Google Docs/Slides to participate in real-time group work.
- **Breakout rooms:** Even in smaller class settings, students commented that breakout rooms were used effectively for active discussions. In one instance, a TF started off section by sharing a quote or image, and then separated the section into separate breakout rooms with specific questions to discuss. Once back in the main Zoom room, groups were able to share what they discussed in their own rooms.
    - Sharing an image/quote on screen-share did double duty, as students were able to feel less self conscious about their faces on camera.
- **Using student feedback/input:** Some instructors restructured courses to fit the differing time zone availabilities, or incorporated student-selected readings into the curriculum.
- **Online opportunities:** Some instructors used the transition to online learning to bring in more guest speakers or incorporate more media into classroom discussions (e.g., planning a guided session with the Harvard University Archives).

Language Courses

- **Translation:** In a translation workshop, an instructor used a combination of Zoom's chat features, Zoom breakout rooms, and a shared Google Doc to mimic classroom translation.
- **Breakout rooms:** Students commented on the use of breakout rooms to help develop conversational skills in language courses.
- **Student collaboration:** One instructor used VoiceThread to have students act out scenes together by linking together videos filmed separately.
- **Zoom features:** Some instructors used the Zoom chat feature as a blackboard.
- **Experiential learning:** One instructor had students bake during one of the classes and speak only in the language throughout the process. Instructors might consider how they

can incorporate students' unique settings/environments into the academic experience, while recognizing that this may not be possible for all students.

Studio Courses

- **Supplies:** Several students commented on the importance and impact of instructors and teaching teams who were able to get students the supplies they needed (e.g., in a painting workshop).
- **Understanding student's contexts:** In a dance workshop, one instructor prerecorded choreography for students and rethought how students could engage in movement, even with limited physical space.