

Qatar Teaching and Learning Forum: Open Zoom Session “Maintaining Engagement in an Online Environment”

Date: Monday, April 6, 2020

Time: 12:45pm -- 1:30pm

- (85 faculty and staff across Education City campuses: Carnegie Mellon in Qatar, Georgetown University in Qatar, Northwestern University in Qatar, Texas A&M University at Qatar, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar, Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar)

Guiding Questions

1. How do you elevate or maintain student energy and morale?
2. Privacy concerns and lack of sufficient bandwidth prevent many students from sharing their video, making engagement and accountability a pedagogical challenge. How do you confront or work around this issue?
3. For courses where students must work in teams, collaborating in an online, a/synchronous space ill-designed for this purpose might be especially difficult. How do you meet this challenge?

Themes, Highlights, and Ideas Shared

Elevating morale

- Focusing less on content at the start of the session and more on the students' well-being (Jörg Matthias Determann, VCUQ).
- Connecting the content of the course to the situation at hand, even to the students' well-being (Byrad Yyelland, VCUQ).
- Assigning each session a theme, such as a TV show, pop culture reference, or a destination. Students use something related as a virtual background and the class warms up with a quick chat about the theme. The more contemporary, the more the students are likely to teach us something we may not “get.” (Shakir Hussain, NU-Q, via email).

Encouraging participation

- Calling on students by name to encourage participation and to balance voices (Dudley Reynolds, CMUQ).
- Pausing to allow students time to respond; announcing raised expectations for participation (Jacquelyn Williams, VCUQ).
- Individual sessions, if a possibility, give students a stronger incentive to participate; individual sessions can be offered with larger class sessions to give students greater choice in how they participate (Hadeer Omar, VCUQ).
- Being flexible in the use of class time; giving students more ownership of the course (Scott Curtis, NUQ).
- Using breakout sessions; smaller conversations can be useful; limit size of group to 3-5 students; time in break groups to 3-5 minutes, maximum. Faculty can join and move from group to group online (Byrad Yyelland, VCUQ, Reza Tafreshi, TAMUQ, Jacquelyn Williams, VCUQ).
- Incorporating active-learning strategies online; example: giving the class a question to work on, then students take a picture of their answer, send it via email; the

instructor then displays the (anonymous) answer to the class. (Ashfaq Bengali, TAMUQ).

Engagement and accountability

- Insisting that no microphones are muted during class time; calling on students randomly helps with accountability (Zeinab Ibrahim, CMUQ).
- Allowing students to use Snapchat filters or objects/figures in their room, for example, to create avatars that serve to hide their faces and still be present (Moamer Qazafi, GUQ).
- Students who were not active in class time before the online transition are even less active during online classes; giving them more attention, calling on them occasionally, helps with accountability and engagement (Hadeer Omar, VCUQ).
- Using mobile apps, such as Telegram and Kahoot, as impromptu quizzes or polls to keep students engaged and accountable (Electrical engineering faculty, TAMUQ). Managing/attending to the authentication process, in such cases, a challenge.
- Question asked concerning at what point are technology challenges permissible beyond what would be a reasonable 1-2 grace period, in terms of students not engaging or keeping up with course activities, i.e., discussion boards, assignments, etc. (Brittany Bounds, TAMU).
- Technology inequities, for example, some EC institutions issue students laptops, were noted. (Jörg Matthias Determann, VCUQ). Likewise, wifi (bandwidth) in dorms was also cited as problematic (Scott Curtis, NUQ).
- Students across our institutions are having very different experiences; many students and faculty have cited doing “more work now in an ongoing way” and having to do more individual, one-on-one or information gathering to understand the unique circumstances our students are experiencing (Dudley Reynolds, CMUQ).
- This correlates, pedagogically to the idea of adopting multiple measures. Various pedagogies/approaches to gauge students’ understanding and encourage interaction in an online space are necessary. Example approaches, strategies include the following: one-minute essay; stopping and asking students to write up a quick summary of key points; using clickers; polling; and Google Doc, as a virtual whiteboard.
- A variety of approaches to promote interaction (synchronous discussion, breakout rooms, and/or using discussion boards in Canvas/Blackboard Collaborate have actually led to increased participation.
- Most, if not all EC campuses have implemented changes to grading policies; EC students can choose a P/F mark instead of a letter grade. Question was raised as to how such policy changes are impacting student engagement at this time (Firat Oruc, GUQ).
- Considering students do not have to choose until the very end of semester, it is uncertain how grading policy changes may be affecting engagement (Scott Curtis, NUQ).

Technology and transitioning to remote teaching and learning

- Preparations, prior to remote T&L, were underway at VCUQ to prepare documentation/guidelines to better prepare students who enroll for summer

sessions to liaise with IT to test and troubleshoot issues with regards to tools, technology, software, etc. (Aisha al-Muftah, VCUQ).

- Important to distinguish this period as emergency remote teaching as opposed to online teaching and learning, as the typical timeline to prepare an online course can take upwards of six months to 18 months (Bilal Mansoor, TAMUQ).
- Course management systems (CMS) are designed for asynchronous teaching and student support; CMS are not designed for synchronous teaching and learning. Bandwidth issues and challenges with various tools, platforms, etc, have been observed (Bilal Mansoor, TAMUQ).
- Open Education Resources (OERs) as a strategy to minimize IT issues during this emergency period as well as the importance of having a back-up plan were also cited (Bilal Mansoor, TAMUQ).
- Educators are encouraged to record synchronous lectures; students, whose first language is not English, have articulated that the recordings have been useful. “Tasks” feature in BB also helps students not accustomed with online learning or those struggling with time management-which includes most to keep track of work that must be completed. Each Task has a status and a due date. (Jacquelyn Williams, VCUQ).
- Graduate students, based on one faculty’s experience, are seemingly not ready for an asynchronous course experience, anymore than undergraduate. Faculty prepared an asynchronous course experience, but found students were “distressed” and not equipped to engage in this way (Konstantinos Kakosimos, TAMUQ).
- We are in the midst of an “adaptive period” and that it is perhaps best for faculty to engage students in video-conferencing, synchronous discussions, etc., and keep changes in instruction to a minimum

Collaborative approaches to teaching and learning

- Moving to remote teaching was both a challenge and an opportunity. Within the studio arts context, many students rely heavily on physical classroom/studio space to do their creative work and are accustomed to sharing their creative process face-to-face. Two faculty combined expertise and used technology creatively. Tools such as G+ Community and digital VR tools were applied as means for students to collaborate virtually as well as share creative processes and meet course goals. However, this required substantially more planning for faculty. (Hadeer Omar, VCUQ).

Resources for (online) discussion

Commonly accepted general principles for successful (online) discussions

Purpose

- being clear about objectives
- designing the session based on these objectives (backward design)

Preparation

- crafting assignments that provide material for discussion
- crafting good questions
- improvising as you find areas of confusion (adaptive design)

Participation

- creating a safe space for discussion (e.g., respect for difference)
- keeping student and teacher voices in balance

Value

- giving students good reasons to engage
 - grades, career goals, relating to their personal interests, etc.

Variety

- offering different kinds of discussion formats (breakout sessions, etc.)
- engaging participation features of discussion software
- using technology creatively

Sources

- Brookfield & Preskill, [*Discussion as a Way of Teaching*](#) (Jossey-Bass, 2005)
- Brookfield & Preskill, [*The Discussion Book: 50 Great Ways to Get People Talking*](#) (Jossey-Bass, 2015)
- Howard, [*Discussion in the College Classroom*](#) (Jossey-Bass, 2015)
- Herman & Nilson, [*Creating Engaging Discussions*](#) (Stylus, 2018)

Rubrics for Online Teaching and Learning

- [Online discussion rubrics](#), Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository, University of Central Florida
- [Participation in Class Discussions – Scoring and Examples](#), Purdue Repository for Online Teaching and Learning, [PoRTAL](#), Purdue University
- [Online Discussion Boards and Rubrics](#), University of Illinois, Springfield

Rubrics (Essential Learning Outcomes)

- [VALUE Rubrics](#), Association of American Colleges and Universities
Teams of faculty and other educational professionals from the United States developed rubrics for sixteen Essential Learning Outcomes that all students need for success in work, citizenship, and life.

Time Management for Faculty and Students

- [Time Management Strategies](#), Online Course Facilitation and Time Management, Whiting School of Engineering, Johns Hopkins (faculty roadmap)
- [Adjusting Your Study Habits During Covid-19](#), Center for Academic Innovation, University of Michigan (student roadmap)