Best Practices for Switching to Online Learning

> These best practices were authored by Prof. Ethan Mollick and Lilach Mollick based on practice, theory, and research done for Wharton Interactive. This article focuses on helping faculty move to online learning, which is more involved than remote instruction.

Students will adapt to an online environment quickly, as long as they have clear guidelines.

Set expectations. Once an announcement of a shutdown is made, send students an email that details how you will run your class during a shut down. *You should prepare this email ahead of time so that it's ready to go.* Students will want to hear from you right away and you can squash uncertainty quickly.

- Explain to students that they will still have class but that classes will be held in BlueJeans and/or via discussion boards. Ahead of any BlueJeans classes, send students the meeting information and reminders about class times and expectations. You can send BlueJeans invitations directly through Canvas.
- Post a weekly Canvas announcement ahead of any classes to give students an overview of the coming class – this serves as a reminder to students that they still have class and assignments due, despite the shut down.
- Consider sending an introductory video to make a connection to students.

Provide structure. Decide whether you would like your classes to be **synchronous** (everyone meets on BlueJeans at scheduled class time), **asynchronous**, or a blend of **both**.

- **In a synchronous class**, the class meets at a specified time (your usual class schedule). Modes of synchronous classes are discussed later in this document.
- **In an asynchronous class**, you can post video lectures and/or readings and a discussion question in Canvas with specific instructions about how students should respond to the question. Remember to include the assessment/grading rubric for any assignment. Typically, students are asked to answer a question and comment on two peer responses in the discussion board.
- **Establish class norms**. Just as you would in a physical classroom, establish norms of behavior. Norms that you have already established in your class will likely carry over, but if not, remind students of your expectations.
- **Hold online office hours**. Send out a schedule for office hours and have students sign up for a BlueJeans meeting with you.
- **Clear up any timing/assignment misconceptions right away**. You can either email students instead of responding to individual students or post a video on Canvas if there are misconceptions or any questions about a particular assignment.

Asynchronous or Blended Teaching

Using a discussion board (whether Canvas or another solution) provides a place for classes to interact and is generally highly recommended – it is where students will have questions answered and where much of your interaction will take place. It's important that you maintain a presence on the discussion board, particularly if your classes are asynchronous. Students will be looking for contact with you; they are used to seeing you in class. To run a successful discussion board, consider the following:

- **Set discussion norms.** Tell students how you will run discussions. Additionally, it's a good idea to have students mute themselves when it's not their turn to speak, particularly with a large class.

- **Use punchy questions**. Students will pay attention when the question itself is engaging. Prepare your questions in advance. Good question types encourage discussion, so provocative or polarizing questions can be helpful. You can also ask students to role-play as a part of an asynchronous case discussion.
- **Monitor community health.** If students are not as engaged as you would like with questions, you can intervene, sending another message redirecting responses.
- **Reward students publicly**. Students look for public rewards; if a particular discussion board is very active, send students a message letting them know how well they are doing, noting any particularly useful individual contributions
- **Encourage collaboration**. When student responses are connected, point that out. Responses that make similar arguments, particularly ones that help clarify a key point, can be called out. Likewise, responses that build on one another should be recognized, encouraging students to actively interact with one another's ideas.
- **Be aware of response visibility on Canvas**. When you post questions on Canvas, *consider whether or not you want students seeing peer responses prior to posting*. In almost all cases, students should not view peer responses before they have responded, ensuring that they do their own thinking, and are not influenced by the substance and tone of peer responses.

Synchronous Teaching

It may be necessary to change your approach to teaching to take advantage of the online environment. Here are some approaches to consider:

- **Lecture-Based Teaching.** It can be hard to get a sense of how a lecture is going online, and whether students are engaged, so you can use Poll Everywhere and other audience response tools to keep students attention (and also grade on participation). The discussion and chat functions of BlueJeans can also be used to collect questions and encourage interactions during your talk. You may also want to assign groups of students to present during part of the synchronous class, splitting it between a mix of lecture and presentation. If you have low-levels of interactions in your lectures, you may want to use pre-recorded short lectures, and use your synchronous time to react to discussion board questions or comments.
- **Flipped Classrooms**. For classes based around project work or problem sets, you can record lectures and have students view them asynchronously. BlueJeans has a record video feature. Make sure the video is no more than 15 minutes long. Use your in-class time to have students present using screen sharing. They can show the latest aspects of their projects that align with the lecture topic, or show the answers to a problem set. You can then offer direct guidance after each presentation, or feedback after each problem set.
- **Active Learning**. You can also assign group work during the synchronous parts of the class, posing a question based on the reading or asking teams to solve a problem. You can also hold break out sessions in BlueJeans in which teams work in separate BlueJeans online rooms and then reconvene to report out. You can then ask teams to present this work via BlueJeans. You can assign multiple opportunities for active learning over the course of a single class.
- **Case-Based Teaching**. Case based teaching can work online, but requires extra preparation. Cold calls will need to be worked out in advance, and you may need to require a pre-class reaction paper to ensure everyone is up-to-date on the facts of the case. You may also want to use live polls to ask people about the choices they would make, which will allow you to more precisely identify who to call on. You will also need to figure out how much you will want to use a live board (screensharing from a tablet can work on BlueJeans), and how much to do with pre-prepared slides. The HBS document, "Teaching with Cases Online" can be helpful in preparation.

General tips

- If you aren't sure about your online class plans, run them by a colleague and see if your class/plan makes

sense to them.

- Try something new. If you don't generally use discussion boards, try a new exercise e.g. have students create memes of a concept learned in class, or have students draw a concept map and post that picture – both exercises can prompt a rich discussion during your online class.
- If you have guest lecturers scheduled, send that lecturer a BlueJeans link; they can join the class remotely. If this isn't possible, interview the lecturer and record the interview and show it in class.
- When you share a screen in BlueJeans so you can show your presentation or prepared debrief, use lots of visuals.

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