Planning and Facilitating Quality Discussions

Planning and Facilitating Online Discussions with experts Flower Darby, Viji Sathy, and Ludwika Goodson. Moderated by Carmen Macharaschwili, regional director of academic programs at ACUE.

[00:00:04] Hello, everyone, welcome to our webinar will begin shortly.

[00:00:38] Hello and welcome to the fourth webinar in our effective online instruction series on planning and facilitating quality discussions. Thank you all so much for joining today. The turnout is incredible. My name is Bernard Mair and I am the chief academic officer at APLU, the Association of Public and land-grant Universities. First, I'd like to commend everyone across higher education for making an astonishing transition to online learning in a matter of days. But we know that moving a course online like being assigned to a classroom is just the start. This webinar series emerged to support the next phase of work to ensure that faculty receive the support they need to provide every student with a quality online experience. Our goal is to have practical conversations with experts on how to teach well online. Let me now turn the session over to Carmen Macharaschwili from ACUE, who will serve as today's moderator. Carmen.

[00:01:55] Thank you, Bernard. And we are so delighted to be joined today by some amazing experts, leaders in the field. Before I introduce them, I'd like to review our agenda. We'll start with a conversation among our presenters to get some context for today's topic, planning and facilitating quality discussions. And then we'll reserve most of today's session about thirty five minutes for discussion and a Q&A with you. Our goal is to have an interactive conversation focused on this topic with practical ideas and suggestions for your online teaching. Please pose your questions using the Q&A button that's at the bottom of your screen and we'll moderate and discuss these questions with our experts. There's also a little thumbs up button. You can if you see a question that you've asked that you would like, move to the top of the line. We can make sure that gets highlighted.

[00:02:49] And then toward the end of the hour, we'll share how we can continue the conversation at our online discussion board and share some additional resources to support your teaching. The topics for this webinar series were inspired by the free resources recently published by ACUE and our online teaching tool kit.

[00:03:12] We heard from many of you a desire to engage in a conversation with experts and each other about these six topics, which we'll do today and we will in our upcoming sessions.

[00:03:24] And also online after today's session.

[00:03:30] But leading our conversation today are Flower Darby, director of teaching for student success at Northern Arizona University, Viji Sathy teaching associate professor in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Ludwika Goodson, coauthor of Teaching at Its Best. I'm Carmen Macharaschwili, regional director of Academic Programs at ACUE. I must especially excited about this topic as it became the focus of my research several years ago. As I worked with Notre Dame and Holy Cross College to create our first online programs, I truly appreciate the opportunity these experts bring us today and what their insights can add to our practices. In this webinar, we've been getting a lot of questions about synchronous and asynchronous discussions. We will be discussing both today and for a definition of those terms. Please look at the chatbox. But today we're starting with Ludie Goodson to get us going on online discussion. Ludie.

[00:04:35] Hello to everyone. Welcome to this webinar and I hope you are well and have what you need at this time. I appreciate being with you and with the whole ACUE team.

[00:04:46] I want to start by telling you what I like about online discussions, which is how easy it is to see how your students are thinking and how shy students start to speak up and participate in the chance that you have to redirect any misconceptions. Now, when I just take a look at some basic discussion forums that are really easy to set up and the first two is an online office and that would be on the next slide where students can post questions and the whole class sees the answers that you give. And the second is a student's social hangout. Often that's called a lounge. But, you know, sometimes it gives it has clever names from the instructors. A third, is it getting to know you discussion where students answer the questions, instructors give them to get to know each other better, but also then the instructor gets to know the students better. Another is a modest point forum which is surprisingly successful. I give you the example of every week in an engineering course where students were just simply asked to tell what their difficulties were for the week, and they started describing them problems they were having and other students jumped in and started helping them out. And then the last time that we often add to a course which is easy to add is a study hall for students. Then there are some more complex kinds of discussions that are content focus to see that in the next slide. I'll give you a couple of asynchronous examples. One is and a sociologist course, where each week the instructor posted a controversial social topic such as Is it OK to hook up? And what he did is he found two different YouTube videos that each expressed opposing points of view and he asked the students to decide what's right and to give the reasons and a rather different example and a media legalities course. The students had three weeks to do research first. Then they entered a constructive controversy discussion session where as teens, they presented opposing sides with logic and evidence. Now, in a synchronous example, the communications instructor treated it as a major project and he had students use a couple of weeks to prepare and they had an asynchronous I'm sorry, they had a

synchronous discussion every three weeks. He set the date and the time for each of the meetings after he looked at their responses for what would be good times to meet. The sessions were recorded and those who didn't participate could view the recording and they could complete an alternate essay assignment. But during this this synchronous discussion session, students broke out into groups and their challenge might be something like identify the ethical dilemmas and videos that the instructor had previously sent, and they would have to then explain why they were ethical dilemmas. Then at the designated time, the groups came back together and a representative from each group would then explain their conclusions and their reasons. Now, whatever the strategy is, I think students do need some basic things and that'll be on the next slide. The first is guidelines for communication. They may not know after all that all caps comes across as shouting or what comes across as harassment. Second thing that they need are directions, questions and challenges and a clear purpose, timelines and procedures to follow and questions that lead them to decisions or to solutions. Of course, the directions will will change with different topics, but some STEM faculty with whom I've worked to use to use a SEAI reporting strategy. It's an adaptation of a writing strategy where students have to report, S see the claim. E evidence. A their analysis and I their conclusion, which would be their last thought. Ellen Jörg at Florida State University does something similar. He has students to self label every post that they have in a discussion area and they label it as a challenge or an explanation or an argument or evidence. A third thing that students need is wait time and balanced facilitation. Instructors usually allow students the chance to respond on their own without jumping in because, you know, if they jump in too soon or they engage too much in a discussion, the students will actually discuss less. Of course, students do benefit from clarifications and from additional examples and resources. And, you know, the instructor can weave together themes that are coming across in the discussion. And then a fourth thing is the question of whether to grade or not grade the discussions. You know, some instructors I've worked with never get points. Most do get points. And most of them like to keep the scoring simple so they might scan the discussions that students are engaged in. They'll give full points for effort. They won't penalize students who make a mistake or don't quite understand something. And then for those students who don't put forth any effort, they'll have a policy. The policy must be whether to deduct points or to give the students some second chances. But one of the things that I think is really important is at the first academic discussion that the instructor sends out a message to every student. So for those who are right on track with what they should be posting in the discussion, the instructor says, well, yes, you're on track and just keep doing what you're doing. And then for those who are not there yet, tell them how they need to improve. And then I would conclude that just as with any class, you know, what the students need and and your method of teaching is what really should really be the driving force behind how you work with the online discussions.

[00:10:52] Thank you, Ludie, a lot of practical information for everyone. Flower or Viji, you have any response or additions?

[00:11:04] There was so much in Ludie's, very practical and helpful. Many presentation that it's it's hard to know exactly what to what to pick out. But I really like Ludie's. Focus on some of the low hanging fruit kinds of discussion forums that you can add to your online classes that help students feel supported in terms of those mudie as point questions or online office or virtual study hall. I think there's a lot of potential there for students to be able to reach out and to support each other as well. And it doesn't take a lot of time or effort to add those elements.

[00:11:47] Did you see it? Hi, sir. Can you hear me OK?

[00:11:56] OK.

[00:11:57] I was going to add, I love the guidelines that were provided, you know, even the simple using all caps and how that is perceived. These are the sort of hidden curriculum aspects that we we expect our students to know. But but they don't always come in knowing that. So it's really helpful to hide those aspects. And I love the idea of making that clear. And I would just say I also really like the idea about the guidelines, because when we talk about inclusive teaching, we often think about the structure that's needed for students. And that's what you're doing when you communicate guidelines as you're allowing people to understand what the guidelines are for discussion. And I'd say, you know, even using your students to help you co-create those guidelines, they evidenced good and practice bad practices and in discussion. So it's helpful to even crowdsource from them some of the things that they'd like to see happen in, of course, and work with them to to really foster a good discussion.

[00:12:55] Thank you. And we do have a link to some netiquette guidelines that talk a little bit more about those ideas around just little things like capital letters and how that can change the tone of a discussion.

[00:13:07] So we will post that in our resources. And now I would like to ask Viji to talk a little bit about STEM and Synchronoss discussion. Go ahead, please.

[00:13:20] Sure. Is there a slide or no?

[00:13:23] No. there you go. Yeah. So I teach a quantitative course and we do a lot of problem solving and our course. And I know that a lot of my STEM colleagues use these kinds of opportunities in class for peer instruction where we have problems that students solve. I'm calling them micro discussions in the same way that we think about micro lectures so we could punctuate our class with questions. And then oftentimes students will work with one another to solve a problem. And in fact, on this short break, I've been following a student group and they've been posting these bingo cards as mediums of things that they are missing from their majors. And and sure enough and many of our stem bingo cards is the turn and talk to your neighbor square, which just goes to show how how frequently that technique is used in our classrooms to get students to talk to one another. And it's not as we know from doing that in class in person, it's not enough to just say turn and talk to each other, because what ends up happening is they might say something as simple as I got. See, what did you get? I got see, and that's not a really rich discussion. Right. So what we want to do is have very specific prompts, like, please justify the answer you selected or why are the other answers incorrect? And when you provide a very specific prompt like that, each and every time students actually go through that process of of the reasoning that we want them to to have, not just sharing the answer, two questions. And so one of the things that I was thinking about when I transitioned online is how do I keep that semblance of the peer instruction in a synchronous format? I have sessions with students that I meet with them if they're able to. And then I post those videos later and I allow for them to answer those poll questions as they would in the classroom and put them in breakout rooms to talk to one another about the justification for their answers. And I think it's important, no matter how you use synchronous time, that the students understand what the expectations are for the discussion.

[00:15:20] So those guidelines, as well as where they might report their answers if it's a single person, how will you appoint the reporter in your group? So really providing a lot of

structure around the timing and reporting elements as well so that students are very clear about what they should be doing. They shouldn't get into their breakout rooms or wherever they are discussing to say what did she say to do again, that you're really providing clear evidence and visuals around what their props are.

[00:15:45] And I have a piece that I coauthored with my colleague Kelly Hogan that came out last week in the Chronicle about how to use Zoom inclusively. And it has some tips in there as well for some of the synchronous activities. In addition to the synchronous activities, I think it's helpful to leverage some of our asynchronous tools like a discussion forum. So I use a tool called Piazza. But there are many tools like it where students compose and answer questions. One one reason I gravitated towards this tool is because students can post anonymously, at least to themselves. They're anonymous. But to me they are not. And this allows for, as Ludie mentioned, quiet students, but not just quiet students. But any student like a student who might feel like their question was a simple question and they didn't want to pose it or they don't want to appear dumb because they're asking something or they're answering in a certain way, or maybe they're feeling self-conscious about things or they're not feeling confident about their abilities. This is a forum where students can post and answer questions and instructors can simply just go in and like the responses that they're seeing from students. So endorsing their responses easily and building confidence in our students. Any asking and answering questions, these are really important things that help them understand that they have the potential not only to understand the material, but to formulate good questions and answers. And then also just thinking about the access to the questions. I think oftentimes when we don't do things in a discussion forum, what ends up happening is certain students might email us a question and we might then email back a response. But that response is not available to every student. Right. And so I want to make sure that every student has access to all the questions and answers, and especially if it's something that would be valuable to them in an upcoming assignment or quiz to know about. So a discussion forum can be a way to sort of level the playing field about who has access to information, who feels comfortable answering questions and so on are asking questions. And then lastly, just talk about when we teach often in times and lie and STEM courses, especially those introductory STEM courses, they're fairly large classes. We might have teaching assistants or undergraduate learning assistants are circulating around the room to help us facilitate discussions with students. And you can use technology to try to simulate some of those things in your online courses. So maybe they if it's a synchronous session, maybe a T-A or a ULA is assigned to the breakout room to help facilitate a discussion or float among a set of rooms that they could go in and peer into. But also, they could be maybe what you're doing is asking the groups to create a response, say, in an online Google document. Maybe they could help monitor some of the discussion that's that's being posted on those Google documents for the groups. But but not not forgetting the fact that you might have support in the classroom and making sure that you try as much as possible to incorporate them in the same ways that you might in a face to face course.

[00:18:39] Some really helpful tips there from Viji I'm going to go ahead and jump in and talk about a few logistical considerations as Ludie directed our attention to asynchronous online discussions where people are not interacting, real time video sharing, some really helpful pointers about what happens if we are trying to lead a discussion over Zoom or something along that lines. But one thing that discussions online have in common is the need for a lot of structuring. And I really see the value of discussions in online classes. In fact, for me, that's where my best teaching takes place because we can interact with our students in the moment. We can detect misconceptions. We can clarify. Ask guiding questions. We can relate current events into how that relates to our our class content.

Now, more than ever, there is a lot to be discussing with our students. And so I really see the value of online discussions. However, I think they don't just happen naturally. I think they take a little bit more intentional thought and effort to have them go off well. And so that's why I'm so excited about today's topic. Both the planning and the facilitating of effective online discussions. So just a few logistical considerations to keep in mind as you're thinking about your discussion, whether it is not in real time or whether it's a group of students working together. First of all, in Ludie touched on this a little bit, really important to communicate clear expectations for your students. You don't want to leave them guessing about how they're supposed to engage in the discussion. So my expertise is in online asynchronous discussions where people can post on their own schedules and interact with each other. And I like to provide very clear guidelines. You know, sometimes it's a matter of your initial post should be at least one hundred seventy five words and refer to one scholarly article, very, very explicit details, depending on the purpose of your discussion. It may be the case that you have something more informal in mind, more of a conversation. And so you can help students understand that by saying you don't need to provide a scholarly citation, but do support your work in your thoughts here. And so just helping students know exactly what you want them to do can really foster their success. I also think it's very important to schedules strategically, again, whether that's asynchronous or real time for asynchronous discussions. You want to think about helping students to have a conversation. Students are busy people and they have a lot on their minds again, especially right now. So they might be tempted to do what we call post and run. They might just submit their first discussion post and not really stay around in the conversation to engage with others and learn from the other students. In order to prevent this, a common strategy is to ask students to post an initial response and then come back and within a few days and engage with other students by posting replies and responses and questions to what others have have posted. So this helps hold students accountable to stay engaged in the conversation and you can be really strategic. For example, you might say the initial post is due on Wednesday and the replies are due by Saturday. Something along that line, it gives people a little bit of time to engage in the conversation. You also want to think about your own scheduling and availability. If you are grading your discussion forums and there should be a due date that aligns with your ability to provide timely feedback. So if you know that you don't want to be in your online class on Sunday, I would recommend not making the due date Saturday night. You might make it Sunday night and then students can you can give feedback on Monday. It's just as one example. Speaking up, giving feedback. It's really very helpful. Online students are working and typically by themselves without the physical reassurance that they get from others in the classroom. And so all the support and guidance that we can give students is really, really important. In particular, I do like to grade forums, but I do like to keep it simple, similar to what Ludy suggested. For me, a really effective way to do that is to use rubrics or checklists. And in particular, I really have found a lot of success with using Linda Nilson's specifications grading approach, which is in a nutshell and kind of an all or nothing. And Ludie touched on this too. Did did the students do what you wanted them to do or did they submit junk effort? And then essentially they get the points either way. And when you use the rubric that is embedded in your learning management system, it actually allows you to really streamline your grading process so that you're not spending all day long doing that and provide really rich and targeted feedback as well. So if you're not already familiar with the rubert tool in your learning management system. Might be something to consider. Now, again, although my expertise is not in the real time synchronous discussions, I imagine that some of these principles will also apply there. And maybe that you can speak to that as we go along throughout the hour.

[00:23:51] Thanks.

[00:23:54] I'd like to add a few things. Certainly the importance of this scheduling strategy. I really appreciate what you said, Flower, about that. And certainly in the example of the communications course that was really important when it Synchronoss to find out when students actually can meet and then schedule. Yeah, it is really good, as you mentioned, to to have a consistent day for doing the different activities. I want to go back to something that Viji said earlier. She suggested that she mentioned the name of the reporter.

[00:24:26] You know, having a reporter in the group.

[00:24:27] And so that brings up the whole idea as part of expectations of also having defined roles for students. And you can say, well, you're gonna be the moderator and you're going to have someone else be that be the reporter. You can have someone play the devil's advocate, but just decide what the roles are and what the students know, what they're. And usually instructors that I worked with rotate those roles across discussions. And then I wanted to mention also something that Viji said earlier. She said something about liking responses that students give. And that is something that I remember from as an instructor who was in a location where she couldn't actually see what the students were posting, but she could see that they were posting. So what she did is she just clicked like like like like what? And the students loved it because they got feedback from the instructor.

[00:25:27] Did you do you have anything to add?

[00:25:30] No, not at this time, I'm anxious to hear what questions come up for folks.

[00:25:34] OK. Yeah, they're rolling in. I just want to thank you all because not only do we have a lot of concrete practical examples here, but I love the way all of you touched on the real advantages to online learning.

[00:25:46] We can be inclusive in a way that perhaps we might not reach the students in our Face-To-Face classrooms. We can structure it for them in a way where everybody gets a voice and we can encourage them to be thoughtful, especially when it's an asynchronous conversation. They can have that wait time to think about what their answer is and engage in different ways. So there are some wonderful examples and advantages that you all mentioned today. But the biggest question on the Q&A board, let's just go right there is about engagement. There are a lot of questions about how do you make sure students are engaged? How do you make sure they're participating? How do you make sure they're opposing quality questions and answers? So please speak to the engagement issue a little bit.

[00:26:41] I am. I don't know about everybody's course management system, but in the systems that I've worked with, there are several different ones.

[00:26:49] It's very easy to see what students are participating in when they are participating. And there's there's a way to be able to click together, click so that all of those students messages come up in a file and then you you can just see what they're doing and you can highlight, you know, what's coming up in discussion. What are the what are the key concepts the students are hitting on and the encouragement, though, part of it. Like if if you're if you're in the discussion forum, I would say just acknowledge what someone has said. So maybe say something like you mentioned that the problem with, you know, whatever the issue is. Can you give me an example of what you mean? So that is just by

asking another question is a really good way to encourage a deeper thinking and deeper discussion.

[00:27:45] Yeah, I would like to to add on just exactly what Ludie was saying for me. You can either police the engagement and sort of require it or you can invite it and encourage it with actually interesting things to talk about. Students really engaged sort of naturally when they're interested in the questions that you're asking. And so it might be the case that you really want to focus on discussable questions, things that have nuance, that have some controversy that students can dig into. I like ludes point earlier about assigning a devil's advocate role. What's the other side of the story? You might also consider offering more than one question in a particular module or discussion forum, because that will allow students to kind of gravitate towards the one that they find most interesting. And I do have a trade secret. I think the kind of discussion question that invites the most natural engagement is when you ask students to write about themselves. And so we all like talking about ourselves and how our experience intersects with the concepts that we're working with. So if there is a way for you to ask the question to your students to say, where have you seen this before in your life or do you know anybody? Have you ever worked with someone? Have you ever had a class experience that you know and inviting students to bring the concept into their own lived experience? Will, I believe, foster more authentic engagement and another benefit? It also promotes academic integrity in terms of. It's really hard to Google an answer about your own experience with whatever that concept might be. So for me to foster the engagement has a lot to do with the interest level of what we're asking students to do.

[00:29:28] I'd like to piggyback on that. Fostering the engagement, Flower. What are the other methods that instructors have used?

[00:29:36] I love this one. It was in a fashion design course.

[00:29:39] The instructor challenged the students to do a search on the web or their favorite design.

[00:29:47] Right. And she also provided students with a guest, which they would compare what they had chosen. So they would post the link to what they found and give the reasons that they chose it and then compare it to each of the four that she had provided.

[00:30:09] And I would add just backing up a little bit. I think we're making the assumption they understand why engagement is important and we should really be clear about why we expect engagement in our courses, what they stand to gain by the engagement. You know, I don't hide from my students that peer instruction is one of the most effective ways to learn in our course. And that's why we turn and talk to our neighbors often in class. Because by teaching, we learn. And so they take turns teaching each other and they then hopefully have some buy in in this process that it's not just about working towards the right answer, but it's about solidifying our own understanding about the concepts. And then also just the idea that, you know, it's important to consider the ways in which all of our students can participate. So, you know, I'm I use polling's a technique in my classroom, my pull everywhere where I have 100 percent of the students engaging in the answer to my question. And and there's a common technique that some of us use when we use this. It's called a poll ripple where a student would answer individually just on their own what their thoughts are to a question. And then I would look at the responses. And if they're not really where I would like to see them in terms of the percentage, correct, I might say, OK, we can do better. Let's let's talk to one another about why we think that answer is correct. Let's

see if we can improve our our overall correct response rate. And then I can show them the pre and post rate like that. Together we created something that was better than the individual. And I think, again, just reaffirming this this message that there is more to be accomplished as a group than there can be individually and in any ways that you can embody that and trend and really just be transparent with your students about it is let's not leave it to chance that they'll just understand why we want what we want.

[00:31:59] I'd love to comment just quickly on that. I think again in online classes, especially helping students understand the purpose of what we're asking them to do and the relevance. We can't be too transparent about that. Students need frequent messaging. And so I think in the discussion forums or just as Viji was talking about there, you know, the ability to learn from each other and and to learn as we teach a new concept ourselves really gets at our sociality and the way that our sociality drives our learning, which is a direct quote from Josh Eyler book, How Humans Learn. You know, we really are social creatures and students may not understand just how much they're able to learn from other students input and examples. And so when we can message that and reinforce the value of how they'll be able to better understand content and maybe work more to work their own personal learning or academic or career goals, I think that does help students love the focus on helping students understand the relevance of what we're asking them to do. Great, great point.

[00:33:05] And I'm going to emphasize that, too, with you Flower, because that is such an important part of motivation. So that is another element of encouraging the students to be participating in meaningful ways in the discussion and then giving them feedback and helps to build their confidence, too, in the discussions. That's another key element in motivation. And hopefully then that leads them to also feeling really satisfied that the effort was worth it.

[00:33:37] All really important points, though, especially right now as we're doing this. Somebody called it, what, coveted transition instead of up when you're planning ahead for a course, it's one thing. But right now, it's especially important to keep communicating. This is what we're doing. This is why we're doing it. This is why this method is important. So thank you so much. There is one question that's very specific that keeps coming up in the Q and A. Ludie, this is for you. A lot of people want to hear more details about the study hall forum that you mentioned.

[00:34:08] It's so easy to set up. You can set it up so that it runs the whole semester. But most of the time, instructors set up a study hall a couple of weeks before there's a major project that's going to be do or an exam.

[00:34:22] And then you can put in whatever directions are appropriate for the context. Basically, you set it up, call it a study hall, and then you can say this is a place for you to review, though. The stuff you've been studying, you know, that you're going to be quizzed on and two weeks or you've got a major project coming up. This is an opportunity for you to share what you're working on, your progress with each other. And it doesn't really require monitoring. It's just a place for the students to study together.

[00:34:56] Thank you. And then I have a couple of questions about inclusivity and access there, a little bit different kinds of questions, but I think they hit it the wrong thing. And I think that you touched on this a little bit in her presentation of two things. What if students are having trouble with access with Wi-Fi or Internet, but also what if they're shy or they're afraid of giving the wrong answer and having it be permanently in that asynchronous

discussion or or on that signal? So both things what to do with these students who are not comfortable or able to participate as fully as it like in this online environment?

[00:35:35] Did you do want to speak first to that? I have a comment. I'd love to hear your thoughts first if you have some.

[00:35:40] Sure. I think the access issue is it is definitely one that we all have to be thinking about very carefully, especially because this wasn't we didn't all enter into this as a pre agreed upon online learning experience. And so we're all doing this remote emergency instruction right now and and being mindful of the fact that our students and even some of our faculty weren't ready in some ways to be doing a lot of intensive online work this term. So I think it's different when you have more time to plan and people are entering into an online course in agreement. But in general, I'd say flexibility around how people can participate is very important. So, for example, when I have the poll questions, I always make those poll questions available to my students who can't join synchronously so that they can also contribute their answers there. And I can keep monitoring how they're doing in the course based on their responses. So always having an avenue for students to participate in the discussion. And as many flexible ways as you feel you can offer is really helpful. And I don't think we should underscore just the ability to pick up the phone and talk to one another. We don't have to use fancy things, right? We can do. I have a Google phone number that I give out to my students and it just links up to my phone so they can contact me and I give them some structure around, you know, if it's a certain time of the day, like I might not be able to pick up. But, you know, just give them some sense that it doesn't have to be complicated. You could just text message me if something comes up for you. So allowing for that flexibility, emailing things, if they can't if I'm having trouble uploading, for example, we're just letting you know that it might be late is helpful. And then the other the other aspect of this that you mentioned was sort of that I guess the not wanting to be wrong. I think that especially in an asynchronous format where it's maybe documented and up forever, whereas in an synchronous settings, we might forget this. This is definitely something we all have to have in our wheelhouse. How to address when a wrong answer comes up or misconception comes up, how to gently nudge the person towards either reformulation of the question or, you know, one one technique that I have in my backpack at all times is to say something simple as that is a great question is often a misconception for students. So let's let's unpack it a little bit and talk about why that misconception exists. So it's it's affirming the fact that this is hard material and that there are going to be some things that are wrong, especially as a novice is navigating the material. So I think any anythings that you can use in your back pocket to really affirm the student and maybe even contacting them afterwards to say, I really appreciated that you post this question because it's one that many students struggle with, for example, can be a really good confidence boost for four students.

[00:38:31] Yeah. Oh, Viji. Oh, all right. The phone, the phone scheduling. Several of the instructors with whom I work.

[00:38:39] Do that. They just. That's the first thing that they do, in fact, is they schedule a phone conversation with each of their students. I just want to endorse that. It's worked really well for them. It doesn't take a whole lot of extra time. And then the reminder about flexibility in the communications course the instructor gave the students who couldn't come to the synchronous synchronous meeting the option to do the ultimate essay assignment on the topic and do the recording for those who couldn't make it. And he's also someone, amazingly, who in a film course was able to work with a student who was blind and helped that student be successful as well.

[00:39:19] Sorry, I was just so excited to keep talking about this topic, didn't mean to interrupt their ludie, but you know, again, I think as Viji reminded us, many of the students who are now doing remote learning didn't sign up for this. And even for people who had elected to take online courses either now or previously, circumstances are vastly different than they were just a few months ago. So I love that idea of offering the different options if if they don't have access to technology. Internet. You know, I'm working at home with my husband and my three school age daughters and we're all juggling access to Wi-Fi. And it's and we're in a really comfortable position to be able to have that. A lot of our students are juggling family schedules and different kinds of demands as well. So I love the idea of, you know, submit a different written assignment. Email me what you can, give me a call. We'll talk it through. But I also did want to touch a little bit on inclusivity in online discussions and again, Viji. You kind of touched on this when a comment gets documented or archived in our online discussion forums. Unfortunately, today, we need to kind of monitor what is happening in the discussions because it may be the case that there might be some marginalization that happens. And again, it's archived. And so a student might make a comment directed at or about another viewer in the course that might be very hurtful and harmful. And there's very interesting research that shows that the person who felt sort of harmed by that frequently goes back to that comment to see if anybody has responded or just to kind of revisit it over and over again. And so as instructors, I think it's really important not only to set the guidelines or to co-create the guidelines for collegial and respectful and civil engagement in these forums, but also to keep in mind that these comments and these remarks are in writing. And if something of a hot moment comes up in the classroom, kind of like you said, you know, you might just be able to sort of move on past it. But when it's documented, it's really important. And so if you were to find something like that, you might choose to delete it. You might save the comment in case you need to pursue some, you know, something with your institution. But you might reach out to the person who was potentially harmed. You might address the issue with the person who made the post just just being aware that in order to make everybody feel safe and welcome and able to engage in the conversation, you do sort of need to monitor what's happening in the discussion as well.

[00:41:54] That's that's so important. I'll give you an example of a student who was in discussion area and he was dominating and he came across as angry and the instructor had tried private communication with the student.

[00:42:12] But that really wasn't changing the dynamics. And what the instructor finally did was just to look at the profiles of students and other groups and how they were discussing with each other and just decided to move that student from the group he was in into another group completely changed the dynamics. Student was happier in another group. The other group was happy with him. So it doesn't happen very often. But it is important to pay attention and then decide what to do.

[00:42:44] I love this topic of inclusivity. When I taught, I taught students that were international and I'm sure many of you are dealing with a situation where they're in different time zones, they might not be as comfortable with English. And I would offer them the opportunity to talk to each other on the phone or if they were near each other so they could talk however they wanted to and answer the discussion question. And then one person would just have to post a summary or a recording of what they they spoke about. They gave especially the people who didn't feel comfortable writing in English. It helped them a lot to be able to point a voice thread or a different way of posting to include them as well and timezones as well. So lots of great information here. There are lots of questions

about assessment and how to. I'm thinking flower, you mentioned the rubrics. Maybe you want to elaborate a little bit about how to assess discussions.

[00:43:42] Sure. Yeah. So thanks, Carmen. I think it's very important to think about what your goal for the discussion is and that will shape your assessment approach. So again, giving the clear expectations of exactly what students should do will also make it easier for you to assess their their submissions. For me, if you have a very clearly defined set of criteria, what they should be doing, and then you align that with your rubric so that the rubric reflects what it was that you told your students that they should be doing. Then the assessment piece isn't so overwhelming or daunting. A very common scenario is to require students to post at least two or three times one original and maybe a response to two or a couple of other students. And again, of course, I am talking about asynchronous, but you might have something to add about synchronous, but you want to give the guidance to students. For example, in their responses, you know, it's not real helpful if a student replies to another student and says, I agree, that's not a great contribution. And so you want to provide that guidance to students to help them understand that they need to add something, provide substantive contribution or ask some questions, or maybe refer to another source or an angle of argument. And then for me again, when I when I've used that sort of all or nothing. Speck's grading rubric, it's just a matter of skimming over students contributions and saying, you know, where they engaged, where they making that effort. If so, they get all the points. If not, you know, maybe they didn't get points on this discussion forum. But I have to add that in the specs grading approach, you can also offer students Oop's tokens where they can resubmit their work.

[00:45:24] It is certainly possible to assess on more of a traditional grading scale with ABCD kinds of levels of performance and that might that might be helpful for your discipline or your content. For me, it's more about the conversation in the classes that I've taught in. And so if they're engaging in the conversation, I give them full points for that. I hope that helps, but I'm happy to see what Viji and Ludie also have to add.

[00:45:51] I would like to add that the communications course instructor treated the discussions as.

[00:46:00] A major assignment. So he did what you suggested. He had a rubric aligned with the criteria and the students would have that information before the discussion so they knew what the expectations were. And then it was graded as a major assignment. But in the discussions and the example I gave the sociology course where there was a weekly discussion and students had to say, OK, which side is right? And, you know, why do I think one side or the other is right?

[00:46:29] The instructor did not give ABCDE or score points, but just did what you also suggested flower, which is let's scan and let's see if there is genuine effort to answer the question, then just give full points. But you do get points. Most instructors still give some points because students will do it for points, even if it's only to.

[00:46:53] Yeah, that's the currency that they work with. So it's nice to use it. And I think I like the approach as an assessment person. I like the approach of the sort of specs like all or none. It makes it so easy to grade. And it really is just it's just about doing the work and not. And you can. There are other ways to provide really good feedback to your students about the quality of work that they're producing. So for example, I dont grade their Piazza contributions, but I look from time to time. I get some diagnostics out of the tool that tell me who are the top contributors to the site, who's asking the most questions, who's answering

the most questions. And I reach out to them individually and I say you're doing a stellar job on the site. And at the end of the semester, I might say, could I invite you to be an undergraduate learning assistant in this course? Because I think you would be a great asset to sort of helping students understand the material. And this is how some of my students who never imagined that they could do anything quantitative start to realize. But I like teaching and I like the idea of helping my peers understand the material. So it's another way to create a sense of belonging. And, of course, that they might not have expected that they would do well in. So I think there's a lot of reasons to give great positive feedback to students who are doing it well and still manage the grading aspects so that it's not a burden to you to monitor.

[00:48:16] I'll just add quickly that for me, discussion forums in in general and then written reflections or written responses or recorded, you know, you can invite students to use their smartphone to video or audio record their responses. For me, that helps students to really think through and articulate their thinking and their response. However, we do hear from a lot of instructors that that adds a lot of grating burden where if they just provide auto graded multiple choice quizzes as an example, it saves them a lot of time. But that's what I really like about that specced grading approach is that you are inviting students to do the critical reflection in the creative problem solving that is so important for tomorrow's citizens without burdening yourself so much with the grading work.

[00:49:02] Now, I'll add one more thing is that I wouldn't underestimate their ability to evaluate themselves on that task. So giving a self evaluation of their contribution to discussions as well as maybe if they've got a small group, how their peers are doing in their discussion, I find when I ask the students to reflect on that there, they match pretty well to my impressions as well. So it's a really great tool to to sort of think about one's own presence in a discussion.

[00:49:32] Great point. And not for emergency learning, so much emergency online, but maybe for planning ahead like I know many of you are doing, asking them to help develop the rubric around what does make a good discussion. And then it's on lights on the students and they feel like they have ownership of that.

[00:49:48] So that's just another thing that we can talk about. But there is a very, very specific question for Viji. A lot of people would like to know more about your bingo cards. Talk about that,please.

[00:50:02] They're not my bingo cards. Just to be clear what you described. Yes. Yes. So the students are circulating. Basically, it's like a bingo card, you would imagine.

[00:50:12] I think like maybe a four by four or five, five to five grid.

[00:50:17] And then in each square, they put something that they expect some students have had some interaction with in that major. So sometimes they might list a popular phrase like turn and talk to your neighbor or they might talk about like. So in biology, they have what are called G.R. cues or guided reading questions before every class session. And so they have a comment about if you've answered your G.R. cues for today, for example. So they're each each square just represents something that might be a pretty common experience for students. And they have fun kind of thinking through, can I get bingo by marking through some of those. So I've had fun sort of peeking in on other majors and seeing what kinds of themes are students are pulling out as experiences that they see in that in that community.

[00:51:05] There are a lot more questions coming in and we will have a chance to expand the conversation in the discussion, but I'd like to know all of you have so much to share. Could you each share a take away or main point as we are nearing the end of our conversation?

[00:51:27] OK. Shall I go or not? The main takeaway is just for me. Be unafraid of setting up a discussion.

[00:51:41] If time is short, do something really simple, like have a modest point forum. Maybe have a study hall. And if you can't do anything else but for major discussions, simply be clear about the expectations and try to think through what you really want the student to do and the order in which to do it.

[00:52:11] What? I think would be good is to remember to ask those what, how and why. Questions.

[00:52:22] Nicely said, I'll jump in. You know, Carmen, I feel like you kind of caught us off guard a little bit because I feel like we've put some of our main takeaways in our first presentations, but it's a good opportunity to sort of wrap up and reflect. For me, it really is about the value of interacting with our students as people. Right now, in this moment, many people are really missing the physical interaction that we and the energy that we get from working together in the same room. But I would strongly argue that you can recapture that in your online discussion forums. And so, again, the circumstance is not ideal. But as you move forward with your exploration of online teaching practice, I really encourage folks to be in there with the discussion forum. As Ludie said, you have to be careful not to dominate. But for me, it's really about responding to students. And the more that you give of your own time and energy in that context, the more your students will get back to you.

[00:53:21] Yeah, these are great. Yeah. I was caught off guard, too.

[00:53:26] I think what I would say is to really be thinking about transparency with your students around why you're doing what you're doing and not assuming that they understand what role discussion has in your course. And and I think using technology wisely as well as thinking about your own time to manage that discussion is really important. As I would advise any faculty member, if you're trying something new for the first time, make it low stakes, make it no stakes. If you want to just so you don't add that extra burden of having to be accountable to students about something. And it and it does ratchet up the stress level for everybody if it's higher stakes. So really just trying to to dabble in things that are no or low stakes is a really easy way to get that across. And I think just communicating with one another, really talking to colleagues and seeing what they're doing and experimenting with, I mean, there's no reason we need to invent everything. We can just learn from one another what's worked and what's not. And I guess I would say the main main thing to think about as even as seasoned instructors either face to face or online. We're gonna have days where it doesn't feel like it's going well, where it doesn't feel like the discussion is moving or that students or yourself are feeling low energy and try not to let that derail you. And just think of it as a one bad experience or one not so positive experience and try to move on from that. But I think it is very difficult right now, especially to be thinking about how will this work online? If you if you're having one or two of those bad days, try not to extrapolate and make it something that you think might be a pattern in the future.

[00:55:10] Thank you. I feel like I could talk to all of you for another hour, but we're running short on time now. Really great information. Again, there will be more opportunities to continue the conversation online in our webinars discussion page. We will provide you all with the recording and the transcript of today's conversation. And you can add your thoughts for the attendees to the conversation that has just started today. Again, I think there was a lot of conversation that just got started and we will continue.

[00:55:53] The next slide, please.

[00:55:59] So for those of you who are already familiar with ACUE, you know, our mission is student success through effective instruction. We appreciate that many of you may be looking for more online content ideas and there are many open educational resources to meet this need. These include videos, worksheets, activities and assessments and different digital formats that are free and don't require passwords. You see here we have a link to OpenStax. Our colleagues here are happy to help. If you don't know about open stacks, it is a Rice University initiative that's committed to improving access to quality learning materials. They've developed in a variety of resources like the ones I described, as well as over 20 educational technology products that are now available for free. Finally, we'd like to remind you that the resources reference today are available at the ACUE Web site, along with other key resources and responses at our partners Web sites. We will post all of these links online following the conclusion of this webinar. Please join us for our final two webinars about recording effective micro lectures and engaging students in reading and micro lectures, where we'll be joined again by Flower Darby and Ludie and by Michael Wesch and Catherine Haras. Thank you so much to Ludie, Viji, and Flower for joining us today. It was an excellent discussion. And we look forward to seeing you again soon. Thank you.