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Welcoming Students to Your Online Environment

Welcoming Students to your Online Environment with experts [Flower Darby](#), [Kevin Gannon](#), [Michael Wesch](#). Moderated by [Carmen Macharaschwili](#), regional academic director at ACUE.

[00:02:43] Thank you all so much for joining us today, the turnout is incredible. My name is Terry Brown and I am the vice president for Academic Innovation and transformation at the American Association of State Colleges and 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, of 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 ensure that every student has 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.

[00:03:35] Thank you so much, Terry. And we are thrilled to be joined today by some amazing experts, truly leaders in the field. Before I introduce them, I'd like to review our agenda. First, we'll start with a brief conversation among our presenters to set some context for today's topic, welcoming students to your online environment. As we are all dealing with a rapidly changing world, the idea of a welcoming environment is always pertinent for wherever you are at this time. If you're on day one of online learning, week 5 or beyond. Most of today's session, about thirty five minutes will be 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 in the Q&A box at the bottom of your Zoom screen. If you see a question that mirrors what you would like to ask, there's a thumbs up symbol that you can click on instead of typing the question again. And this will help us to prioritize the questions that have the most interest. Next, you will see a raised hand symbol tool at the bottom of your screen. This is the place where if you're having technical difficulties, you click on the raise hand and it will signal a member of our team to help you. Finally, the chat room window is a place where

you will receive one way instructions from our team and references to resources that come up during our discussion today. 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. And you can see we're recording today's session. The topics for this webinar series were inspired by the free resources recently published by AQ in our online teaching tool kit. We heard from many of you a desire to engage in conversation with experts and each other about these six topics, which we'll do today in the upcoming sessions and on the webinar discussion board. Leading our conversation today, our Flower Derby, coauthor of *How to Be a Better Online Teacher*, Kevin Gannon, author of *Radical Hope A Teaching Manifesto*. And Michael Wesch, author of *Teaching Without Walls*. I am thrilled to be moderating this conversation focused on welcoming your students before transitioning to ACUE. I was one of the faculty members who implemented some of the first online courses at the University of Notre Dame and at Holy Cross College here in South Bend, Indiana. Therefore, I truly appreciate the opportunity these experts bring us today and what their insights can add to our practices. So welcome again, experts. And let's get started with Flower Derby.

[00:06:30] Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for taking the time to be here. I know how precious time is. And many people are getting information overload right now among lots of other things that they're juggling. So thank you for taking the time. I wanted to start by sharing an experience that I had last summer, and it really helped me to think deeply about how we welcome people into learning spaces. So I teach parties at my local gym. And last year, I was getting ready to go into class. I had cut it just a little bit short and I was racing into the building and I was following a woman who was walking in with her rolled up yoga mat. And I thought, oh, good, somebody is coming to class because it was a beautiful day. And I thought, who would choose to be inside? As I rounded the corner into the hallway where our studio is, I observed this woman standing outside the open door with her rolled up mat. And I thought, why doesn't she go in? And immediately I answered myself.

[00:07:25] It's because she doesn't know if she's supposed to. I was running a little bit late. I wasn't in the room yet. The door was open, but the lights were off. There was no music playing and no one else was in the room. And she was standing there with uncertainty. Not sure if she was in the right place at the right time. If she was supposed to go into the class or not in the moment, I said to her, Are you here for class? And she said, Yes. Makes a great me, too. Come on in. Flipped on the lights, got the music going. And it wasn't long before more people came to join us for class. But it really got me thinking. I think many times when students click into our online classrooms, they might feel that same way. The lights are not on. The music is not playing. And try as we might to create a good sense of presence, which is an awesome thing to do. It is still the case that we are not probably going to be there real time as every student comes into class, and nor can we or should we be. But let's think today about how we create that ongoing sense of welcoming. So every time a student clicks into your online learning environment, they feel welcome, supported, valued, appreciated. They see the lights are on, they hear that music playing and they know they're in the right place at the right time. For me, this does not have to be a complicated thing to do. I'm a big fan of starting small and keeping things simple so that I can do them if they're overwhelming or too complicated. Chances are that we won't do those things. So for me, I love to keep it simple, and the way that I create that steady state of welcoming for students is by being very deliberate in the tone of writing in my class. Like it or not, online classes are still very text heavy. Videos are awesome. But we do a lot with the written word and my encouragement, my strategy to share is to really bring your own voice into your written communications. So for some reason, when we get communicating in our online classes, all of a that we become good robots and we don't have to. There's

no reason to instead make a deliberate effort to bring your own voice, your personality into your written communications.

[00:09:39] So I make that intentional effort. And I think now we're going to look at an example of what might commonly happen. It's very easy to post concise, but let's face it may be terse reminders to students. Some of you have been missing quizzes. You won't pass the class if you continue doing that. But if you read that from a student perspective, that does seem a little bit cold. There are ways that you can soften and warm up your communications by being friendly, by being supportive, by being encouraging and recognizing the work that students are doing.

[00:10:15] So there's another example here on the slide that emphasizes that I'm here to help you in. And I understand life is busy, especially right now. Life is tough. How do we communicate compassion, support, empathy, and that we're on the same side as the students? It can certainly happen in our written communication. And for me, that's a very simple way to do that. Although, again, I would remind you, it takes intentional effort because if we're not actively thinking about that, we might slip into that more concise, almost robotic or mechanical way of communicating. So that's one strategy I wanted to lead with today as it just creates an ongoing tone of students feeling welcome every time they come into the class, whether it's day one or several weeks into the semester when the energy can lag. With that, I'm going to leave it there. We'll have more time to talk as we continue throughout the hour. But I'm happy to hear other's thoughts and see how we're going to go on from here.

[00:11:20] Thank you, flower. Kevin, Mike, any any thoughts?

[00:11:25] Well, I've I love the metaphor of, you know, thinking about how we create a welcoming atmosphere or turn the lights on, as you say. And so I think about what I do in a real class. You know, I try to say hi to everybody and meet them a little bit. And so I'm immediately thinking about it. How can I do that in an online environment?

[00:11:44] And, you know, it takes a little work, but I think that little work can go a long way if you reach out. You know, if you have a really big class can be difficult. But a smaller class, you should be able to have that time to reach out to each student and just say hello. It doesn't have to be a long conversation, but just just say a little bit about yourself and get to know each student individually. I think it could go a long way. I just love the metaphor, though, of thinking about the little things we do in a real classroom and what how can that translate to the online environment?

[00:12:17] Flower, I appreciated the point of everything being as text mediated.

[00:12:25] It's some.

[00:12:27] Sometimes difficult to see how we come across, just purely through the written word as opposed to all the things that we depend on and face to face classes like hand gestures, and I talk with my hands a lot or, you know, vocal inflections and things like that.

[00:12:41] We all have those colleagues who write those emails where we sort of read them and say, are you really sure that's how you want it to sound? And I just think we need to be really conscious of the fact that in this new online space that many of us are encountering extensively for the first time, that that reality of being mediated largely

through written text is something we should be very mindful of. So I appreciated you bringing that point up.

[00:13:05] Thanks again. Thanks, everybody. And Kevin, you're up next.

[00:13:12] Well, Flower, I also appreciate you bringing me up that point because it actually leads very much into the thoughts that I wanted to sort of lead off with. It's, I think, more important now than ever to be thinking about this top pick of welcoming students into our online learning spaces and whether it's the equivalent of a student coming to a parady studio without the lights on or something. A little more grim looking like this. We should be thinking about how we are bringing students and inviting them into learning spaces. But more importantly, how they might be moving through those learning spaces when we're not there with them. It's one thing to be in a physical classroom that is that optimally designed for the type of teaching that we want to do because we're at least there in person synchronously with students. But in this new online mode, a lot of what we're doing is asynchronous, if not all of it. And so our students are in the learning space of our course without us. And so if they are using, for example, the learning management system at our institutions to is their point of access to the course, sometimes learning management systems, you know, think of the title learning management, not learning encouraging systems can sometimes put barriers in front of students rather than inviting them into spaces. Many of our students certainly did not sign up for online classes. The transition is has been a rough one for all of us. Many of our students lives are different off campus. And so thinking about how they're welcome to our learning spaces is not all a universal principle, but one that's particularly relevant right now. And so I like using the spatial metaphor to talk about these these new areas in which teaching and learning is unfolding, whether we've been doing it for a week or two or whether you're just coming back from spring break and moving into this online pivot. So the questions that we should ask ourselves is what makes a welcoming space online? And thinking about it from the student perspective. So if we could go to the next slide, please.

[00:15:20] So this is a slide of an interactive exhibit room from a children's museum in Seattle, Washington.

[00:15:27] And so forget to use the spatial metaphor. Consider the layout of this space as opposed to the shut and locked gate. This is an open space. It's airy. It's lit. There are things out in the middle that are sort of encourage the observer or the visitor to mess around with. To do something tactically to all of, you know, to to explore this space in a way that, you know, in this case looks non-linear, but is very open and accessible and inviting to students. Now, we can't all create, you know, well-polished museum curatorial spaces that our online classes, especially given the very short time frame that we put on. But I do think that we could use this image as a sort of guiding metaphor about welcoming students and thinking about ways to cure rate. The learning spaces that we're in, what other materials are we bringing in? What can they mess around and play with? What can they read? What can they counter?

[00:16:21] What can they engage with even if they're not in the space synchronously with us? So first and foremost, that space has to be accessible and we'll be talking about accessibility a lot during this hour.

[00:16:31] I have the feeling, but I also would suggest that even in the seemingly minor decisions that we make can actually have significant consequences. So when we're engaging with students, yes, our courses tend to be very text mediated. But are there

ways that we can get away from that and add more of a human touch? Consider asking your students to use a photo instead of just the generic silhouette of a head for their avatar. For Daniel may not have to be their face. It could be a meme. It could be their pet. It can be whatever. But at least we're not looking at, you know, generic head silhouettes and various shades of gray in a discussion board. Are there ways that we could use audio and video to provide students feedback? It's one thing to read a set of written comment on a short essay. It's another thing to hear me talking through the essay with a student with all of those sorts of vocal inflections and cues that might be more important, especially if the feedback is a little more extensive or a little more intense than the student was ready for. So making choices about how we're presenting ourselves, how we're presenting the spaces and how our students are going to be in those spaces would we aren't necessarily there with them, I think are crucial. So we should be asking ourselves, what are we saying to our students even when we don't know if we're saying something at all?

[00:17:55] Go ahead, Mike.

[00:17:58] Yeah.

[00:17:58] Well, I think this leads really well into my presentation, so I might hold off on my comments just a little bit, but I'm certainly a big fan of the of using audio and video for all kinds of different things, including things you might not have thought about, including like giving student feedback and things like that. You can because you can have that inflection. You can you bring your humanness to it. There's something nice about that, I think. Especially in this time when we can feel a little disconnected and the students might feel a little disconnected from the class. I think that sort of just having a human voice behind it could be really powerful and doing audios is quite easy.

[00:18:40] I like that.

[00:18:41] I certainly agree, as both Kevin and Mike have just pointed out, there's so much that's communicated through the tone of voice and such.

[00:18:49] Personally, I work with a lot of faculty who even even adding a simple media element may be daunting, which is why I I tend to focus on the simple things. But I do want to really come back to your point, Kevin, about it being a learning management system. I love that I hadn't heard it put that way before, but I personally find these environments rather cold, very sterile, very lacking in any kind of personality or warmth or light or airiness or comfort. And I think that there's a lot of work to be done on the part of the companies who are creating these environments. But meanwhile, what can we do to bring those elements of comfort and make it a more pleasant and inviting place to be? I think that's a really great reminder, Kevin. Thank you.

[00:19:34] Thank you. Mike, are you ready to go?

[00:19:37] Yeah, I think so. So it's really ties in really well with both what we've heard so far from Flower and Kevin. So my basic idea is, is kind of putting something at the front door, you might say. Of course. And that thing at the front door is essentially what you do at the front door. You say hello. If you've never met them before, you say a little bit about yourself and then you expect to hear back from them. And so I think just putting a really simple video right in the front door, so to speak, of you just saying three things about yourself or showing them your space. You know, especially during this time, like we're all in spaces that we didn't expect to be in. So just showing them that and then asking your

students to do the same thing. And I'm purposely using a cell phone right now for this recording because I want to show you just how easy it is to do. You know, I'm just I just you just turn on your cell phone and hit record. There's nothing technical about it. And yet making a video is really hard. I want to start my video here in the bathroom just to show you what this looks like. You know, I'm holding a selfie stick here. This is not what I signed up for. I didn't learn this in graduate school or anything about, you know, how to how to make videos. But nonetheless, I've had to learn to make videos because I do a lot of teaching online. And so I decided to create a little presentation for you. This is called How to Make a Video, a non-technical introduction by me. Then being non-technical, this means I'm not going to show you like how to, you know, find the right lighting and all that kind of thing or fancy photography equipment. Instead, we're going to start with step one here, which is to find your why? So that's not what you'd expect from us first step. But let's just go see if we can find my wife right now. I think I left it over here.

[00:21:28] So I'm just going to. Let's see here.

[00:21:32] Take me through my house just a little bit, so this is how you can like say hello to your student and show them your space. Here's my son Wilson. And just pro-tip, any video with cats in it is always a winner. Here's my big why here and see what I have written here. So my wife is to see if I get better lighting. See this? So my wife is to create voracious learners who lean into difference. OK. So anytime you have a Y like this, it's always gonna be surrounded by some house, you know, like how are you going to do that? And so I've written a few house up here. You know, I want to curate and create amazing content and amazing materials. I want to have great questions, great questions. Lead people on a quest. I want people to feel like they're on a quest. I want to create and nurture community. It has to be accessible, inclusive, open and safe, a place to take chances and try new things. And you can see there's actually a little Y down here, like why make a welcome video? And this is the reason, right? Because you want it to be accessible, inclusive, open and safe and so on.

[00:22:49] So.

[00:22:52] So that is step step one of you know, you have your Y, right? Secondly, this is step two. Step two is you have to find there why that is. I like to before I do any video, I want to sit there and contemplate it. Like who are my students? What do they need? What are their purposes? And you know, this has to happen before you ever push record. You have to really think deeply about that and you might have to go back to step 1 and and rethink your Y after you figure out their why. Then step three, brainstorm. So you can see here, I did a lot of brainstorming, lots and lots of pieces of paper all over the place, just brainstorming. None of it really made any sense. But eventually it starts to make sense and you get to your basic ideas down and that moves you to step four. Simplify before you do a video. It's a really good idea to have it so simple that you can remember it with like just five words. And for me, it was these five steps. I knew that I was going to take you through these five steps. So the moment I started talking, I know like I'm going to just try to connect with your purposes and your needs. And that's the foremost thing on my mind. And I study these five things that I'm going to try to get through. And that then finally takes me to step five. And that is Connect. And that's Connect before you press record. And that's the step where after you simplified your idea for the video, just take a moment. Take five minutes. And again, just go back to them. Go back to your students. Remember, this isn't about you. It's about them. That'll calm your nerves a lot. You know, for me, like, I've always really struggled to be on camera and that I struggle until I just got over the idea that

this was about performing. It's about connecting. And once you get over yourself and just look through the camera rather than at it, it makes a big difference.

[00:24:51] So that's a that's my. Little presentation on how to make a video.

[00:25:01] If I could, I'd love to jump in and just appreciate. Mike, your authenticity. If I walked by my daughter sitting on the couch and said, oh, that's Emerald's, she would throw something at me. What I like to is the reminder that maybe it feels a little uncomfortable to be on camera at first, but you get over it.

[00:25:22] And when you remind yourself of that true purpose and I like to encourage folks to remember the first time they stepped into a classroom to teach, probably we felt nervous and less than confident and probably we tripped over our tongue and had bad hair days and times when class didn't really go that great. But with experience and with practice, we've more you know, most of us become certainly more comfortable with teaching in person. Same thing here. We can we can embrace the awkward as we were talking about recently and just acknowledge that maybe this is a new format of communication for us and that's OK. We'll get it.

[00:25:58] Thank you.

[00:26:00] And Mike, I think your use of just your paper car and your cell phone shows us really clearly that some of the stuff that we may initially think is kind of beyond the scope of what we're able to do, especially in a rush time for a actually eminently portable and in fact maybe better for being that way. So I direktor teaching at Learning Center at my milllion diversity and some of my STEM faculty colleagues were going nuts trying to figure out how to record sessions or they were working out, you know, problems with either mathematical language or drawing. You know, one of our genetics professors is how do I draw these cellular processes? I use our smartboard in the classroom. And my first instinct was like, oh, we'll find a whole bunch of whiteboard apps, right? Well, like a bad we'll do all these. And by geneticist colleagues says, actually, I figured it out. I just put my webcam on my lay-up stand. And what I wanted to show a diagram. I just tilted outward to a piece of paper that I was drawing. God, I was like, well, that's perfect, right? But I think it's a great lesson for us to realize that it doesn't have to be a new shiny tool. It could be the things we have right in front of us. And it was more effective and certainly easier than any other solution that I was thinking of the point. And I really appreciated your video reminder of us that the stuff that we have layered on our desk or in our drawer could be that all the tools that we need.

[00:27:17] Yeah. Yeah, I find that I have found it very exciting to teach online.

[00:27:25] It took me a while to get there because I was forced online like many people are. And, you know, a lot of people watching right now are probably forced online. And I was also forced online.

[00:27:34] But after I think is maybe four weeks in just a few things, I just did a few things like little creative things that I couldn't have done in a classroom that I could do online. I started to realize like it's not that one is better or worse than the other. They are different. And as you adapt to it, you can get just as excited as you get about teaching in person. Teaching online is you can do all these really neat things that you just you cannot do in a classroom. So now I actually I request to teach online and in person every semester. That's my choice because I love doing both.

[00:28:12] Thank you so much. I think it's so important, this theme I'm hearing of authenticity, it also helps us to remember and to remind our students that they can also be authentic pets and children. Welcome. Right. People realize we're in closed spaces right now. So I'm getting a lot of questions. And so I think we'll start the Q&A session now. The main question, top question is of people who are teaching very large classes. Any suggestions to maximize and personalize the learning when you have a large group?

[00:28:47] I do this a lot of can I go first or I do a lot of big classes both in person and online. And so it's something that Kevin mentioned was going asynchronous with a really big class.

[00:29:02] You often have to go asynchronous. And maybe it's better. Do is asynchronous. But even more important, there's still ways to create a welcoming atmosphere and create community in an asynchronous context. And the one that I use most is what I call challenges. That's basically assignments. But they're like really low level assignments that are fun and interesting and allows students to express themselves in some way. And so, for example, one challenge we do is called the 28 day challenge.

[00:29:31] And it's 28 days to break a habit or build a new habit. And they just track each other throughout throughout those four weeks. And I'm an anthropology professor, so we tie that into our evolutionary heritage and our capacity to build habits versus instincts and things like that. So it ties into a larger discussion about who we are as human beings. But it's also just this great activity for students to build community and they can do it asynchronously just by you know, they're on their own path doing this 28 day challenge and they post, you know, daily or weekly. They're their progress. So that one's worked really well.

[00:30:14] I do think it is possible to create those engaging, learning experiences even in large enrollment online classes. Shared a great example of one way to do that, which is to connect students with each other and end with an activity that is kind of inherently interesting. The more that we can bring in activities that are related to our learning goals for the course, but also just plain interesting, more fun, the more students will choose to engage. I know that currently the situation right now is so odd and many faculty are thinking that they will lecture synchronously to 150 students, whatever it might be. And for many reasons, that's not necessarily what we might recommend. Students may have difficulty logging in at that time. Synchronous video conversation is actually the most complicated and the most prone to problems or technical difficulties.

[00:31:07] So I'm I'm definitely a fan of recording micro lectures. And if I'm not mistaken, we have a webinar on that topic featuring Mike, who does some amazing things and then build in strategic use of your learning management system to to engage everybody in the class. That's kind of the unique thing about online classes, right, is if you're talking to a roomful of 150 people, you're not necessarily engaging one to one with your students. But it's possible in an online environment that everybody does have a voice and a way to interact. So personally, I'm a big fan of online discussion forums that when used well, there's lots of ways to deploy those well, but they can be a really great way to create meaningful engagement and interaction at a quite micro level with individuals and small groups of students as well.

[00:31:59] I might I might also mention real quick, so I study religion. And so I'm actually on a Zoom call. I was on a Zoom call today with a bunch of religious leaders here in town

from all different faiths. And what was interesting was that they had they have had to come up with ways to maintain community through this as well. And boy, I got a ton of ideas from them. You know, some of them are having like mass meetings, like which is essentially a large lecture. Right. But then they use the breakout feature on Zoom and it does this automatic thing where it just automatically creates groups of six or eight or whatever you want. And you could create like a an interesting question for people to ponder and then break them up into groups of four and they're talking to strangers.

[00:32:42] But that can be really an interesting space for exploring those kinds of questions and other things that the church leaders were doing were, you know, a lot of them were modeling their ideas off of things that they learned in in CrossFit, of all things, because CrossFit is all about community as well.

[00:33:04] And they've had to create ways to maintain community. And so they do that. You know, they have like a workout of the day and then people post how they did on that. Well, the church leaders just translated that into let's send out meditation of the day or a prayer of the day and then have people reflect on that.

[00:33:20] So these are like, again, like low level things that can touch people in different ways and they can share what they're what they get out of it.

[00:33:31] Thank you. Along those same lines, I'm getting a question about what do you do when students have disengaged from the course? What's the best approach when the community is faltering maybe or people are disengaging, Kevin?

[00:33:46] So there's a several answers that come to mind when I hear that question. But I think first is we really ought to be very simple and generous when we think about our definition of engagement in this particular time. My campus hasn't formally closed, but about 90 percent of our students are back home or somewhere else. And so our students routines are changing. There may be more work or caregiving demands. And so maybe the way that they will choose to engage in the course optimally is not the way that's possible to engage in the course realistically. And so in our immediate short term, I think that should be one of our guiding principles. Now, having said that, if there's someone who isn't even in a loose orbit around the learning space that we have, yeah, I think it's really important. And reaching out personally would be the first step. So do we have ways that we could contact that student either via email or through a message out of the L.A. Mass or, you know, even a text message? We have our student information system will let us send text messages to students. They've opted in to allow that. And so a quick text even, you know, hey, I'm just checking in. And I'm not ending it with, you know, you better get back quick. But, you know, I think it's most effective, at least of the experience that I'm having with my class right now is to pose some questions to students. You know what? What can I do to help? Are there any problems that you're running into if you haven't already think about surveying your students? Are you in an area with reliable Wi-Fi? What kind of device of Internet access do you have? What can I do to make things easier rather than just making the assumption that all of our students are able to engage online with the same capacity and with the same proficiency? So it you know, it's I know this is probably kind of a frustrating answer, but there is it may be necessarily one right answer, but I do think it's important to think about rather than a one size fits all here is how do engage students. We should be thinking in terms of its one size fits on over and over and over again.

[00:35:45] And I like what you said there. I think that anybody, no matter where you're at in your semester right now, if you've just started online, you should probably do like weekly feedback, both anonymous and non anonymous if you'd like, but just provide students a way to tell you how things are going and maybe even require them to tell you how things are going. Give a few points for a survey that they fill out about how things are going and then do like you could do like a live video, you know, responding to those comments and talking about some changes. Don't be afraid to change some of your format early on because, you know, just be real with them and say, look, this is new to me. It's new to you. But we're going to try to do the best we can and keep your eyes on the big.

[00:36:35] Why? You know, the big goals and your students will follow you if it's in good faith. Going for those those goals that that they signed up for and that you're trying to guide them toward.

[00:36:48] I think that's well said because it also helps us remember that we need to be modeling the type of engagement that we're wanting to inculcate with our students, right. And so some of our students who are not experienced online learning, which is a lot of it. Right. You know, certainly a lot of my students would say this is not what I signed up to do. So a willingness to engage may not always equate with a knowledge about how to best or most effectively do so. And so even walking them through something like what Mike just did in terms of showing us how he makes good videos. You know, maybe we do that with our students. Hey, I'll try to post a brief video response. And here's one way you might be able to do that and then literally walk them through that. You know, that might be the same sort, you know, tangible models rather than just sort of abstract ideas about pleasing age more I think are more likely to be successful to.

[00:37:40] Thank you and. Along the same theme really is there are a lot of questions that we're seeing about access and inclusion. So what about students who have learning challenges or access challenges? Any thoughts on that?

[00:37:58] I'm a I'm a big fan of basically trying to make sure that all of my material is available, at least in audio and text, so that there's minimally a visual and an audio format. And that's useful for everybody, you know.

[00:38:12] And this is the important thing when you think about accessibility and inclusion. You're you're not you're not just talking about like classic disability or anything like that. You're talking about for all kinds of reasons. People might not be able to look at text and maybe they're just too busy, like they're just running around all the time.

[00:38:31] So they just need audio that they can just pop in their ear and just walk around, do dishes and watch the kids while they have the audio. So so what I do with my content is I try to create about three hours of reading each week, help at reading in quotes here, because some of that is documentaries. Some of them are podcast. And then anything that's only text, I will actually read to them and I'll add my own little commentary. And it's one of the things my students love the most about my online classes is that they can just like listen to me and some people actually listen to me and read at the same time. I've got students say this is the first time I've actually read everything for a class before. And it's just because, you know, we're providing it in multiple formats. It makes it very, very easy. In the end, I actually then can I can provide my students with two downloads for the week. One is a p_d_f_ that includes all the readings for the week. And then the second one is this m_p_ three. That includes everything, including the video. I just turned into an empty three. The reading, you know, is me reading it into the podcasting. Just lay it out on a

timeline, if you're curious. If you if you need a free editor, DA Vinci resolve is free and it's fantastic. We can send a link out later for that. But just in general, like providing a three hour m_p_ three for people for each week is just so simple and they just know that they have to get through that. And that's the material for the week. And it goes a long way toward making a class accessible.

[00:40:04] I'd like to jump in and add a few more suggestions. I think that the importance is to really think about all the complexity and the challenges that students are navigating right now. I heard of one first generation student who went home from campus and in their home they now have their parents and other people in the family who have needs for the computer and synchronous meetings. And so and other students are relying on smartphones and phone service only without Internet. So really the lowest common denominator to make as much of the content as accessible as possible is to really use that learning management system and the simple tools that are in there, because they're all compliant. They are all accessible. So again, coming back to some of the simple things that we can do in the learning management system, such as quizzes and assignments, online discussion forums, using announcements. Those are ways to help people engage as and when they can. And then I also wanted to touch on some recommendations that came out of a webinar that was hosted last week by a/c and you and some very simple and straightforward recommendations for ensuring or is, as they said, safeguarding equity and inclusion. And a lot of the recommendations were about communicating frequently with students, asking them how they're doing, what's going on, how you can help them, talking with them about what learner, what needs they may have based on their own cultural backgrounds or learning preferences or challenges that they're navigating right now, just essentially extending a lot of and visibly demonstrating a lot of caring and support.

[00:41:47] That goes a long way in terms of keeping students engaged to as we were talking about just a moment ago. As Kevin said, if you can send a quick email or a text, a lot of times online students feel like they're invisible. And when you reach out to them on a personal level, they can say, oh, you remember that I exist. And so I would recommend that you be strategic about that. I know some faculty who keep a spreadsheet literally, of which students they're reaching out to on a week by week basis because it's a big time drain to try to be really fully present with everybody. As many faculty are learning right now. But again, simple, low tech and caring. I think that goes a long way for people as well.

[00:42:30] And I have two quick suggestions building on what both Michael and Flower suggested. The first is that important to communication? Even if you've already started back up in that's online pivot, you've been going for a little bit. If you haven't done so already, consider using something simple like a Google form where you can create and send out a check in for your students where you ask questions like what's your level of Wi-Fi access? How are you doing right now? What do you know? And so I created a Google form where I had students right from 1 to 5. You know, what do you have? Availability isn't any good. What kind of devices are you using to get online? Are you using a data plan and are using your phone? Just trying to figure out who needed what and where that lowest common denominator was for my class. And I've got students who are in the Dominican Republic. I've got students who are in rural areas of my state, Iowa. So, you know, access and productivity was a really big consideration. So I was able to get a better handle on it. Doing doing that sort of assessments. I highly recommend doing that for your students. And then second, if you're using tools, whether it's the elements or something else, keeping simple and making sure that those tools have good, stable mobile apps is also a

consideration to think about. So what my classes involve a lot of blogging and I built a WordPress site. So WordPress has a really good mobile app. So a student could still be engaging in the sort of class forum we have on WordPress through an app. They don't need to be on a desktop or a laptop or anything like that. So if you do things like WordPress or blogger or Skype or zoo, you know, those all have pretty stable mobile apps. And that could be an easy way as well to make sure that as many students as possible are able to engage with the type of community you're building.

[00:44:13] Great discussion. OK. A lot of questions about when to use synchronous discussion and when to use a synchronous discussion. We touched on it a little bit, but maybe we want to elaborate a little bit about when each medium is most appropriate.

[00:44:32] I would say asynchronous at this particular moment, we're worried the more a synchronous, the better. I think the colleagues who of mine who have been trying to keep a steady class schedule of 1 to 150 were going to meet for this class. We're going to use Xoom that has been at best, marginally successful. Colleagues who have done some synchronous meetings but also recorded those actions and saved the chats from them. I think those are the colleagues that have been very successful trying to balance this need for immediacy and communication, but also recognizing that everybody's schedules such as they are, are completely up ended. Obviously, you know the context of your students and class matters, but I would say that asynchronous doesn't mean works. And in fact, asynchronous can often mean better. It leads to Richard discussions, as Flower points out. You know, we if we have a larger class, we're not doing one on one student interactions in that in-class environment. But in an asynchronous online environment, yeah, we've got we've got the opportunity to do that. Asynchronous discussions, you know, well-structured and asking good questions with, you know, the sort of defined roles and expectations we want our students to be playing. Those couldn't lead to really thoughtful and deliberative discussions that are unfolding slowly where people actually have time to think about what they want to say before they feel compelled to have to raise their hand and say it. And the students who are the quietest in our in-person classes are sometimes more empowered and confident about participating asynchronously because they had time to think about what it is they want to say and how they want to articulate it. So asynchronous, I think, you know, if we get over this obstacle thinking that it's going to somehow cheapen what we're trying to do, I think it can be a really rich tool for us and we should take advantages of the affordances that an asynchronous learning environment can actually provide.

[00:46:25] I would, yes. Sorry. Thanks, Mike. I'll go quick and then give you the floor. For me, it's all about thinking carefully about the purpose of the interaction. And if there is something that really does require your real time presence so that your students can engage with you. That would be a time to offer a synchronous virtual office hours or a study review session, something like that. But I would really recommend that you don't make that required, especially right now. Love the idea, as Kevin mentioned, of recording that session so that people can access it later. For me, it's about really being very strategic, about if it's really important for you to be there real time. Answer questions, engage with students. That might be the synchronous time.

[00:47:07] Mike Yeah. I'll just add, I think this API fit in with our next webinar about organizing your course a bit, but I like having one due date each week in which everything that's due is due at that time. And I try to limit it to maybe, you know, the list of things that need to be done should fit in ahead. Not they don't need.

[00:47:28] They shouldn't have to be like written down and carefully managed because they're doing it for four or five other classes at the same time. So if your class has 10 things and do at different times, it's just gonna be a big mess. So I like to have one due date and that kind of speaks to that, the asynchronous piece of it. But in sort of doing, I offer synchronicity as a possibility. Right.

[00:47:53] You can do like Monday when you start the week. I have like a p_d_f_ with like 10 big ideas that are going to look at this week and I'll just do a Xoom meeting in which I'll go over those 10 ideas. It's only like a 10 minute presentation. But if anybody wants to be on at 9:00 a.m., when I do that, they can come on. Xoom is completely optional and then they'll be part of that interaction which will be recorded and then posted at the top of that week's module as an introduction to that week's material. So there is a space there every Monday at 9 a.m. if anybody wants to come. But it's it's totally optional. And of course, you can have office hours, you know, open an optional as well, where you can meet one on one with people. But I think something Flower mentions in the toolkit, if you check it out, is that you also have to kind of bik be clear about what your time limits are as well, because otherwise you're gonna drive yourself crazy working way too much and too hard and so on. So be up front with your students about when your email times are like my students know that if they email after 4, I'm not going to get tell it to it until 9 the next day.

[00:49:02] And so just creating those sort of parameters so that students know what to expect from you can be good for your own your own health. You know, throughout this.

[00:49:13] What others suggested about holding office hours online. We know students don't really called the office hours. Many of them don't really know what that verdict means. And it's been really helpful for me since I started teaching online to call it class chat. And that's kind of literally what we're doing, right? An online chat and using a tool like doodle or outlook or something to let students weigh in on what times work best for their schedules to hold those and then try to schedule something that at least meets most of their windows of availability. Those two things have been really useful in actually getting students to engage and to come in. It's not formally structured, but to be available regularly in a zoo meeting where a student can jump in and ask some questions, chat and go back out. Sometimes several are in there together. That's a really useful way and a very easy way, I think, to build that sort of welcoming presence and that sort of consistency that maybe many of our students are looking for, especially if they're remote from campus.

[00:50:11] Thank you. We have about five minutes left, and I will tell you there are lots of questions about the difference between remote learning and online learning. There's some questions about how to assess online. But I think this might be an interesting way to finish. I'll let you choose. But the question is, what are some of the things that you can do now that you couldn't do in the classroom? So you can choose any of those. But I thought that was an interesting way, too.

[00:50:40] Well, I'll I'll just I'll say I teach anthropology and I.

[00:50:47] Started teaching online, and I spent the last three months in Papua New Guinea, in Southeast Asia, doing lectures, essentially lectures, micro lectures from those places, I could not do that in the classroom. I couldn't like travel the world. And I really that's the key thing for me is that I realized that an online class is not online. It's out in the world. I can be out in the world. My students can be out in the world. And so it changed the way I do assignments. I do assignments where people can actually show me their world and their environment and the people that they're around. And I do the same thing.

[00:51:21] And so it just became an out in the world class rather than an online class. And that it's fantastic. I mean, I just absolutely love doing it.

[00:51:31] I want to speak briefly to that question as well, because it is, I think, inherently very interesting and for me, what online classes we're all experiencing it right now is we're letting people into our personal lives in a way that we wouldn't otherwise. So I've been teaching along for a very long time and I remember a couple of years ago I was making a little micro lecture. My daughters popped up behind me and were bickering or just jumping into the video. And, you know, time was in the past that I would have stopped that recording, thrown it away and started again and after yelling at my girls to stay out of the video. But now I've learned to just embrace that this is my home and working from home. And. And we all get to see into each other's lives in a in an interesting way that without being creepy about it, I think really strengthens the connections that can be difficult to form in an online environment. So I just love the fact that we're letting each other into our lives in a different way. Right now.

[00:52:28] Yeah. For me, teaching online both in my own experience over the previous few years, but certainly right now is a really, I think, rich opportunity to rethink or reexamine some of the assumptions that we've sort of been fertilized about the way that teaching and learning work and what's effective and what isn't and why we do what we do. Storyin But I also teach classes and academic success and work with our academically at risk students. And I think one of the interesting things that comes out of teaching online is and certainly in history we talk about coverage all the time. You know, what does this course cover? And it's worth remembering that coverage is what instructors do, not what students do. And so now in this abrupt online pivot, you know, what am I do I need to cover or are we teaching and learning? And how does learning work? Now, in this new space where I don't need to necessarily present everything to students, I'm rather curating from all sorts of different places, even if I can't travel to another area of the globe when I'm teaching my ancient world history class to have my students in a 3D artifact at the Metropolitan Museum of Art has on one of its online exhibitions. You know, I don't have to develop any of that. I like them, too. But we talk about as we digitally manipulate an object from ancient Mesopotamia, thinking about, you know, what this thing is and how we know it's. And so what it does is it take the subject that's very remote.

[00:53:50] Ancient Mesopotamia, both chronologically and physically.

[00:53:54] And it moves that right into the screen in front of us where we're either synchronously or asynchronously looking at this thing in a way that wouldn't have been possible for students to personally do before. So thinking about what are the opportunities that we have now that we're in this much larger, at least potentially larger learning space. And how does that change the way that we think about what it is that we're really trying to do in our courses? For me, it's been a really rich opportunity to to consider that and to stay, which is hard sometimes in these in our present moment, but to stay focused on possibilities rather than problems, because I know what the problems are. But to think about what the possibilities are, if we say that word IEG is the social bullshitted, the emancipatory process that we believe it is, this is a good opportunity for us to think of different ways in how we model that.

[00:54:45] I do want to touch really briefly, I know we're getting short on time, but I wanted to touch very briefly on the questions around this current experience or remote teaching versus online teaching. And again, for me, it really is about doing what we can do and

keeping it simple in order to enable our success and our students success. So for me, this semester is about finishing close to helping our students finish and get credit. And if that takes a very, very simple form and you don't have all the complexity that you might want, that's fine. It's about accepting that some of what we've been talking about today and in the future, webinars will take more time and deliberation and planning than we have right now. And that's OK. You know, hopefully people will see the possibilities, as Kevin was just saying, and want to engage further in robust online teaching. For right now, if it's simple and if we help students cross the finish line, that's great.

[00:55:41] I think that's a great message for the conclusion of our discussion. Flower. Thank you so very much. What a great discussion today. Just to let you all know, there are a lot more questions coming in. But never fear. At our webinar Web page, you can find a discussion board that will be moderated by AQ and our experts over the next couple of weeks. So you can keep the questions coming. You can keep the discussions going. And at this site, you'll also be able to find a recording of today's session and a transcript. Please visit us and continue to add your thoughts to this discussion today. And as those of you who are who are already familiar with AQ, you know, our mission is student success through effective instruction.

[00:56:29] We appreciate that many of you may be looking for more online content ideas.

[00:56:33] There are many open educational resources to meet this need that include videos, worksheets, activities and assessments in different digital formats that are free and don't require passwords. Our colleagues at Open Stacks are happy to support these needs.

[00:56:56] And finally, we'd like to remind you that resources reference today are available at the ACUE Web site, along with other key resources and responses at our partners Web sites. So this isn't over. Thank you so much to Kevin, Mike and Flower. But I'd like to remind you that we will be having. Sorry that we will also be having more webinars upcoming. We have webinars about managing your online presence, organizing your online courses, planning and facilitating quality discussions, recording effective micro lectures and engaging students in reading and micro lectures. We will be joined again by Flower Mike and Kevin, along with Viji Sathy, Kevin Kelly, Ludy Goodson, April Mondy, Catherine Harris, Alyson Snow and others. So thank you again for joining us today. Stay safe and have a great online class. Thank you so much.