

Online Instruction Survey Feedback: Tips for Faculty After the First Week

Introduction

We hope the tips we offer here can help you maintain the right balance for you and your students. We recognize every teacher has their own unique style, relationship with students, and that each subject matter requires different approaches to teaching online. We hope you find these useful, as they are built on the experiences of faculty and students at AUC last week as well as good practices from all over the world.

1. How To Best Communicate With Your Students In The Online Environment: A Key To Engagement And Effective Interaction

- **Communicate consistently** - students should know where to go to find assignments, important announcements, and course materials. Let students know whether they will find these on Blackboard or email or Google sites or whichever place. Use one place consistently if you can. We recommend Bb the main portal for students to access materials and announcements unless you have been using another platform successfully.
- **Be as personable and empathetic as you can** - It can be difficult to maintain rapport with students online, and at the same time, these times of social isolation requires us to be empathetic to each other despite each of our own anxieties. Feedback from students shows they value synchronous (real-time) video calls, even if not everyone can keep their camera on, but just hear each other's voices and be in each other's presence. They value this togetherness with you and each other. It also helps if you maintain a channel of informal communication, where you and they can speak as you would when you meet on the plaza on campus :) This can be a space on the online discussion board on Bb, or something like a WhatsApp group or Slack team if you're comfortable.
- **Communicate as frequently as necessary but not more.** This means at least once per class session, and trying not to overwhelm students with several emails a day. Collect all your ideas, reminders and instructions in one announcement on Bb. Because we are all suddenly communicating exclusively online, students are receiving more email and Bb notifications than ever before and are more likely to miss one if you send too many on the same day. Bb announcements are also stored and tracked so students can find them easily.
- If you want to plan course content or assignments on Bb ahead of time, design them with **dated release** (i.e. make them available to students at a later date) so that it appears to students on the date you want them to see it, rather than the date you post it. This will reduce their anxiety at seeing a lot of material/assignments at once.
- **During synchronous sessions**, find the right balance between asking students to speak up and asking them to write in the chat. Find ways to ensure everyone has a chance to participate rather than just the ones who unmute their mics fastest. This can be done by using the hand raising feature (Zoom and Bb Collaborate have this) or the chat.

2. Managing Your Students Expectations and Revisiting The Workload

- **Less is more.** This does not mean reducing rigor of your course, but focusing on the most important learning outcomes and the most efficient/effective ways to achieve them. You may need to make some changes to your syllabus and plan for new ways to assess student learning. **Don't assume students have more time on their hands**, but rather assume that things take twice as long as they normally would. Remember that all of us have higher levels of anxiety and fewer avenues for entertainment and relaxation than usual, and that the self isolation has effects on everyone's wellbeing. Some students are more vulnerable to anxiety/depression than others, some still need to learn to manage their time and become autonomous learners, some have additional family responsibilities to elderly parents or younger siblings, or have several people at home needing to use the wifi/devices.
- **Make your content available in manageable segments.** This means shorter videos (5-20 minutes).
- **Make sure your instructions are as clear and simple as possible**, but also make sure you are clear on how **students can ask for clarifications**. Here are some examples, and you can choose the combination you're most comfortable with.
- **Maintain online office hours**, either by being available for an hour at a time and students drop in, or ask students to schedule a slot. There are several tools to help with this, such as Doodle, or others ([see comparison](#), some are free) you can also create a simple google sheet with the times you are available online for your students.
- You can create a **Bb online discussion forum for Q&A** about assignments so you don't receive many emails asking about the same thing
- You can have an **informal channel** of communication with students where they can all see your answers to questions (e.g. WhatsApp or Slack).
- **Periodically check in** with your students on whether they are able to manage the load for your course. This can be as simple as a 5 minute question at the beginning of a class session, or asking on an informal channel of communication. You can also take a quick poll at the start of class. Follow up with students who are struggling. A quick email can do wonders.
- **Give deadlines but be flexible.** Deadlines help students manage their time, but students have varying circumstances, and it helps to be more lenient with deadlines than usual.
- **Be kind to yourself.** If it's becoming a burden to grade the students' work, then it is probably a lot of work on them as well. This is a shock to our daily lives and working life. Keep things simple and try to focus on ensuring students are learning. Choose your own approach to lessening anxiety around course expectations.

3. A Short Guide for Balancing Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

It is important to find the balance between ensuring course material reaches all your students equitably, and offering emotional support and a social space for students (and yourself!).

Please remember that while the majority of your students have generally good internet connections, access to their own devices, and few home responsibilities, some will struggle with poor or inconsistent internet infrastructure, shared devices, and additional family responsibilities and distractions.

Although all good practice in online learning, and especially in times of this crisis, advises focusing on asynchronous (self-paced) learning, we have found at AUC and elsewhere, that the special circumstances of social isolation has made students hungry for synchronous (real-time) interaction and connection.

Our advice is to combine synchronous and asynchronous learning **wisely**, e.g.

- ❑ If you and your students are enjoying meeting via synchronous videoconferencing (e.g. Zoom), keep doing it, we all need it for socioemotional reasons! But make sure you stay aware of any students who don't show up or whose connection keeps dropping, to ensure they don't fall behind. Make sure anything that is important is recorded and available to students who cannot be online at specific times for logistical or social reasons. This means try to **record important synchronous Zoom** sessions and share them with the class. You will find a small number of students need it because their connection drops occasionally or for the entire session.
- ❑ We **highly recommend** that faculty do not take attendance during this period of online instruction.
- ❑ **Remember that asynchronous can be highly interactive and is more sustained.** It's a way to continue conversations beyond the limitations of time and space, which allows you to go deeper, reflect further, and connect more. One way is through [Bb online discussions](#), but there are several other ways [described here](#)
- ❑ Online recordings of lectures or real time zoom sessions are not meant to replicate the classroom experience. **You do not need to lecture for the full class time.** Create a balance between the material students prepare and engage with asynchronously, and the online live interaction when you can.
- ❑ **Have any non-interactive material shared asynchronously** and as early as possible. E.g. lectures can be recorded ahead of time in 5-15 minute segments, and shared with students, followed by synchronous (e.g. Zoom) discussions afterwards where students can interact with you and with each other.
- ❑ **Keep your office hours**, synchronously if possible, so students can drop in or take appointments and ask questions
- ❑ If possible, maintain an **ongoing channel of communication** - ideally a **semi-synchronous** space. Faculty we know have used WhatsApp, Slack, or Facebook groups, but you can also make a Bb discussion board "ask me anything" which you check **frequently**.

Finally: Keep learning more about how to ease the transition to online instruction

- [Check out our revised guidelines](#)
- [Attend a Webinar](#)
- [Request a CLT consultation](#)
- [Video production guidelines](#)
- [Zoom good practice guidelines](#)

Stay safe!