Reflecting on Remote Teaching: Lessons from Spring 2020

Across five discussions, 85 faculty shared their reflections on what they learned about remote teaching from the spring of 2020. Below are some of the important practices and ongoing challenges they noted.

Effective Practices:

- Getting students into small groups is vital:
  - Zoom supports this synchronously. Breakout rooms important.
  - Discussion boards more effective in small groups.
  - Group projects can build student community.
  - Students working on Google Doc – either synchronously or asynchronously – allows instructor to see what is going on (even if students in breakout rooms).

- Using synchronous time for interaction. Active learning important.
  - Absent whiteboards, students can scan work on paper and share it.

- Create asynchronous interactions among students.
  - Discussion boards can be effective.

- Create human connection and community.
  - Build in time for checking in and social moments. Early and throughout the semester.
  - Allow students to share their experiences when they want to.
  - Talk about your own feelings too.
  - Create clear channels for communication. Some mentioned Slack or texting.

- Regularly collect feedback from students: how they are doing and what is working.

- Find ways to help students help one another.

- Individual meetings with students welcome. Phone calls good option.

- Structure AND flexibility vital. Have clear deadlines, expectations and regular accountability, but be open to students who need to adjust those.
  - Give students some choices.

- Equity:
  - Open book exams promoted equity.
  - Recitations at different times to account from students in different time zones.
  - Make discussion boards and other asynchronous interactions meaningful.

- Give students more control over their own learning. Give students choice in what will study. Help them find its relevance for them in this world.

- Bringing experts in from around the world can make use of the online format.

- Include a discussion of how to use the technology and your expectations for students’ use of it.
  - Encourage students to be visible in synchronous sessions. Recognize that may not always be feasible.

Broad Ongoing Challenges:

- How to create community from the start?
- How to provide students with needed emotional connections and support?
- How run asynchronous interaction/discussion well.
Discussion boards hard to make meaningful: need to be genuine interaction, not just assignments.

- What is the appropriate level of work? How much should we assign?
- How do we set expectations for workload for the fall? Students may be asked to complete assignments more regularly than they are used to. How do we let them know this, know why, and keep this from becoming more stressful?
- How do we set expectations for course quality for fall?
- Workload of grading and feedback can be huge.
  - Need TA support.
- What to do about exams? How do we meaningfully assess students?
- Zoom fatigue is real. Must manage how much time students and faculty on screens.
  - How long should recordings or synchronous classes run?
- Equity:
  - Internet access still a problem.
  - How help students deal with demands of home and family?
  - Can we get students books for the fall? Avoid too much screen time.
- How do instructors deal with demands of home and family?
- TAs need adequate support and cannot be asked to do much.
- Many students still very distracted by world or personal events.
- How much to talk with students about what is going on? Be open to wide range of experiences and anxieties. How to recognize the difficulties of the situation without adding to stress?

Specific Needs:

- BlueJeans does not work well for small group work in class
- Need more tools for asynchronous group interaction. Several suggested Perusall.
- How to have students write on common whiteboard?
- How to embed quizzes or polls in asynchronous lectures?
- Is there an easy way to use scientific notation in typed work?