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ADVICE

8 Ways to Be More Inclusive in Your Zoom Teaching

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PHOTO BY GABRIEL BENOIS ON UNSPLASH

By this point in the Covid-19 transition to remote instruction, you've probably had

a few sessions on Zoom. You've taught a few classes, met students for office hours. No doubt more than once, you've seen a lot of students staring blankly at you after you pose a question. (*Insert crickets-chirping sound.*)

Faculty members are getting a crash course in Zoom and finding it can be supremely awkward, at least at first. One reason for our collective uneasiness: Most of us are not well acquainted with the "hidden curriculum" of Zoom — all the unwritten rules and expectations that you're supposed to know but none of us have been taught. Faculty members and students together are diving into a new tool with little to no experience with it, technically or culturally.

As you lead a class discussion or a meeting on Zoom, it's all too easy to lose people in the process. But the principles of inclusive teaching can help you reach students in a virtual classroom, just as in a physical one.

As longtime advocates of inclusive teaching — the practice of embracing student diversity and designing courses in ways that reach all students — we know how important structure is. More structure in face-to-face teaching works for most students, without harming those who don't need it.

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Fortunately, there are ways to incorporate structural elements into remote teaching, too — and it's not too late to add them, with the goal of reaching more of your now-online students. So if you're in the "emergency fine-tuning stage," looking ahead to more remote teaching this summer, or both, here are eight suggestions to help you keep inclusiveness in mind along the way:

Before a session, ask students to consider the settings for their names. In face-to-face teaching, if you ask students what you can do to help them feel welcome, one of the most common responses is "know my name in class." Apply that lesson to Zoom: Invite students to edit their name on display and choose how they would like to be addressed. Suggest they consider adding a preferred pronoun and/or a pronunciation guide, too. As educators who teach large classes, we've always dreamed of having students' names attached to their faces like this, so let's take advantage of the best aspects of this tool, which makes it easy to learn and use their names.

Establish the rules of engagement for each Zoom meetup. In our own courses, we've found that if we ask students to use video in Zoom, most do. (Be aware that some can't because their internet access is too spotty to make the video option work, or they may feel uncomfortable sharing their work space at home.) As always, we advocate being transparent about the reasoning behind your requests. You might also decide which other aspects of class culture are important to you — such as asking students to maintain eye contact, keep their audio muted until called upon, use a certain method to ask a question, or indicate in a particular way when they have to leave a session early. Invite students to suggest a few rules of engagement of their own, since, at this point in the transition to remote instruction, they have probably seen both good and bad examples. As we learned in our initial Zoom sessions, in March, many students had no idea (and some anxiety) about the etiquette professors might expect online.

Use different ways for students to "speak up." In Zoom, just as in face-to-face teaching, there are many ways to hear from people. As self-declared introverts, we're now learning in our own campus administrative meetings what number of people starts to feel like "a crowd" on Zoom and when we might be tempted to retreat and shut down. Likewise, the more ways you can allow students to engage, the better. Besides instructing them to click on the hand-raised symbol to speak, you can allow students to use the chat tool or you could open a live external Q&A. For really quick questions — "Can you see my screen?" or "How are you feeling about the material so far?" — just ask everyone for a thumbs up or down.

Give careful consideration to the way you start. Without structure, the beginning of online meetings can be very awkward. As people join in at different times, consider using those initial minutes to build community. Invite students to pick a virtual background that tells something about them — you could even propose themes: the place you would be if you could snap your fingers and make it happen, the food you are most craving. Another way to begin is to pose a question — "What's one thing that you're grateful for today?" — that students answer through the chat tool. They can scroll through responses as they get settled.

Be intentional about how you end your Zoom sessions. In face-to-face teaching, the universal signal that class is nearly over is that students start packing up their notebooks and other materials. Find ways to make the closing of your virtual class more structured and routine, too. For example, you might end every class with students sharing their "muddiest point" in the chat window before they leave, so you know what to go over again in the next Zoom session. Or you could invite students to hang around after class if they want to chat more informally.

Break out the breakout-room tool. Consider adding to your repertoire the division of the class into small groups. Many students are more likely to participate in a small-group discussion than in a classwide one. The tool itself will randomly assign

students to small groups, but you can change the default timing settings of when they enter and exit the breakout rooms, as well as who is in which groups. To keep the first words out of their mouths from being "What does she want us to do?," provide clear instructions to explain the prompt. Ask students to share their names and Zoom locations before beginning the discussion or assignment. Tell them how much time they will have, and how and where to report the results. Groups function more inclusively with more structure, so consider assigning someone (use random criteria, such as "the student who has the largest pet") to report on each group's results once back in the main Zoom meeting. To hold them accountable and give you formative feedback, designate a place (such as a Google doc) to show each group's thoughts or work.

Provide resources and opportunities for asynchronous learning. One certainty in these uncertain times is that students face a whole host of barriers to remote learning — unreliable internet access, computer snafus, even different time zones — that they don't encounter when we are together in a physical classroom. For that reason, record each Zoom session in order to be inclusive. If your subscription allows, record to the cloud to create audio transcriptions. (Another option for transcription: Upload your class sessions to YouTube and then post the link in a secure place on your campus's learning-management system to protect students' privacy.) Post the audio files, too, since video can be difficult to view for some students. Create an online discussion forum that asynchronous users can contribute to before and after class, even if they couldn't contribute in real time. In general, it's helpful to ask yourself: How can I ensure that students who aren't able to join in any synchronous activities feel included in the learning and in our class community?

Lastly, acknowledge that we're all learning together. It's understandable that you may feel frustrated, sad, mad, or any host of other emotions about switching to Zoom (or some other website) from the comfort of your usual classroom. This is not

what you, or your students, signed up for this term. But as Harriet Schwartz, a professor of psychology at Carlow University, wrote on the Scholarly Teacher website, "We are always teaching on at least two levels. Clearly we teach the essence of our disciplines, and at the same time, by virtue of our presence and approach, we model ways of being in the world." To that end, you can model how remote learning doesn't have to mean exclusion and social isolation. Perhaps now, more than ever, is the best time to reassure students that they belong in your classroom and you believe in them.

Postscript: This essay is aimed at faculty members, but we also have created "A Students' Guide to Zoom" that may be of use to readers. It can be found here.

If you have questions or concerns about this article, please email the editors or submit a letter for publication.

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