

Creating Community in a (Semi?) Remote Environment

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As online courses become routine offerings at institutions across the world, more professors who teach them are embracing the notion that “**social presence**,” a concept promoted by the researchers D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson and Walter Archer in the early 2000s, is critical to the success of the online learner.

Together with cognitive presence and teaching presence, **social presence occurs when students can connect on a human and emotional level**. This is more likely to occur, the researchers concluded, when students can see and hear each other than when they simply read text-based messages.

Social Presence Correlated To...

- **Higher student satisfaction**
(Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Swan & Shih, 2005)
- **More frequent student-student interactions**
(Tu, 2000; Stein & Wanstreet, 2003)
- **Increased actual & perceived learning**
(Picciano, 2002; Richardson & Swan, 2003)

I had one professor that I genuinely looked forward to each week, as **they always took time to ask about what was going on in our personal lives**, and gave us room to discuss the news and our personal victories. It was nice to hear about things that didn't revolve around COVID-19 or homework. I don't know what your class sizes look like, but **my prof required at least one personal meeting** with them to check in, and to see if the student needed any assistance or even just a half hour to vent about what could be frustrating them. I enjoyed my meetings, as it was just a time to talk, and I was able to ask my teacher how they were doing, and what I could do as a student to help them :)

peachesandpiano, "If you HATE online classes, what can at least make them better?" Reddit,
https://www.reddit.com/r/college/comments/hokanq/if_you_hate_online_classes_what_at_least_can_make/

KEY: quality over quantity

A 2016 study showed that **quality** of instructor-student interactions was the most influential course design feature affecting student performance

Jaggars, S.S. & Xu, D. (2016). How do online course design features influence student performance? *Computers & Education*, 95, April 2016, 270-284.

3 Principles of Humanized Online Teaching

Pacansky-Brock, "How to Humanize Your Online Class,"

<https://create.piktochart.com/output/5383776-how-to-humanize-your-online-cl>

Presence

don't be a robot

Empathy

see things through your students' eyes

Awareness

get to know your students

Presence

- Reach out before semester starts
 - Let students get to know you
 - Create a welcome video
 - Design syllabus thoughtfully
 - Provide feedback via audio or video
 - Offer synchronous meetings
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Let Students Get to Know You

“It’s important for instructors to present themselves as a real person, and also design a course that involves opportunities for students to do the same thing,” said Michelle Pacansky-Brock, author of *Best Practices for Teaching With Emerging Technologies*.

That does not involve a single formula, she said: “Everybody does this differently. Some instructors get really goofy and can be playful and really fun in videos.” She is more reserved, she said, but still lets students get to know her interests and personality.

“I share who I am and all of my identities,” Jody Donovan [Colorado State University] said. “It’s not just about my credentials as a faculty member. I’m a white woman. I have an invisible disability. **I talk about the pieces of who I am and how that informs how I show up in the classroom. Then I ask students to introduce themselves in the same framework.”**

Sharon O’Malley, “Professors Share Ideas for Building Online Community in Online Courses,” *Inside Higher Ed*, 26 July 2017

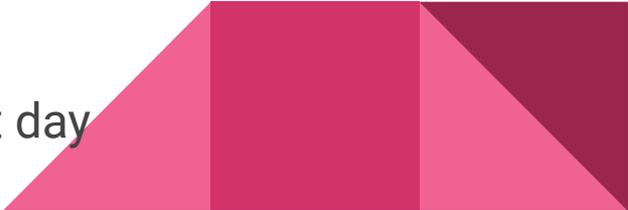
Video Tips

- Keep it short! 2-3 minutes for intro videos
- Be on-screen as much as possible
- Don't include information that may change
- Be human! Mistakes are OK!
- Consider using video to record "Microlectures" on your course's "sticky topics"*

*Educause, "7 Things You Should Know About Microlectures,"
<https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2012/11/eli7090-pdf.pdf>



Syllabi

- “Liquid Syllabus” designed to be viewed on mobile phone
 - Example: <https://sites.google.com/view/ethnicstudiesbyfabiolatorres/>
 - For more info:
<https://brocansky.com/2020/06/humanizing-pre-course-contact-with-a-liquid-syllabus.html>
 - Link to course schedule as Google doc/sheets so that changes are updated in real time
 - Consider formatting syllabus as an FAQ page
 - “What do I do if...”
 - “Do I need to...”
 - “Can I...”
 - Create video going over syllabus to save time on first day
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Empathy

- Be approachable
 - Check in with students individually
 - Support students through difficult times
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Creating Social Presence Through Caring

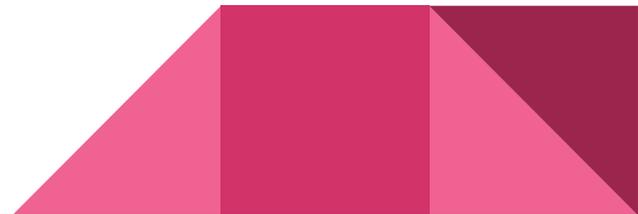
- **Greet students by name** when they enter the “classroom,” or create a playlist of songs that you use to welcome students into the virtual classroom.
- **Begin with a check-in.** Consider asking students how they are doing using a “rose/thorn” format, or to express their week with a meme or emoji.
- Build in time for **announcements** and **free time** for students to interact with each other.
- **Model vulnerability** & share your own uncertainties to signal to students that it’s OK to do the same.
- Encourage students to **use the chat** to respond to one another, but make sure it doesn’t get distracting or inappropriate.
- End class with a **closing circle** by having students express a takeaway or question via chat or in a Google Doc if time is short.

Be a “Warm Demander”

Key: build a trusting relationship and then be firm with & demanding of students

- Be intrusive: follow up with students who are falling behind
- Hold students to high standards
- Cultivate the full intellectual capacity of students
- Rigor derives through empathy

Michelle Pacansky-Brock, “What is a Warm Demander?” YouTube, 4 February 2020,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_DaYqYW3xY



Awareness

- Survey students
 - Use low-risk icebreakers to get students comfortable
 - Explain pedagogical choices
 - Be clear & consistent
 - When possible, adapt active learning strategies for online
 - Build in formative feedback loops
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Getting To Know You Survey

Send out a survey before class begins (example: <https://brocansky.com/humanizing/student-info>) using Google Forms or Microsoft Forms

Possible questions:

- Preferred name & pronouns
 - Solicit feedback on key course components (e.g.: Would video feedback work for you?)
 - What are your goals for this course?
 - In one word, how are you feeling about this class?
 - Share 1 thing that may impede your ability to be successful in the class
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Icebreakers

- **Where Are We?** Average out the coordinates of everyone's current location (latitude + longitude), to determine the geographical "center of mass" of the group. Look up something interesting about the place you landed
- **Jamboard Playground** Use Google's Jamboard to allow students to collaborate on a topic of your choosing (or theirs!)
- **Rapid Fire Teams** Create random breakout rooms with 2 people, give them 2 minutes to complete a task before you mix up the groups
- **Grab & Share** Have students grab something that's within easy reach then take turns telling a story about that item
- **Zoom Bingo** Ask a question that can be answered with one word, have participants write their response & hold it up, anyone with a row/column/diagonal line of the same wins

Selected icebreakers come from this more extensive list:

<https://medium.com/future-of-design-in-higher-education/zoom-friendly-warmups-and-icebreakers-3400c8b7263>

Establish Clear Expectations & Processes

- Create a Learning Pact



A LEARNING PACT

“I am a partner in your learning.”



What you can expect from me:

1. I will provide you with a clear, organized course that is designed to ensure you meet our course outcomes in a meaningful manner.
2. I will provide a variety of assignments to ensure your learning needs are met.
3. I will be actively present in your learning.
4. I will provide a supportive and safe environment for you to share and discuss ideas with your peers.
5. I will reach out to you when I sense that you need support.
6. I will treat you with dignity and respect and be flexible to support your individual needs.
7. I won't be perfect. I am human and will make mistakes at times. I will view mistakes as an opportunity to learn and grow.
8. Is there anything else you'd like to add to this list?

What I will expect from you:

1. You will strive to be an active participant in this course and strive to meet due dates.
2. You will maintain an open line of communication with me so I understand how to support you.
3. You will contact me if you have a concern with meeting a due date.
4. You strive to regularly contribute to collaborative activities to ensure other members of the community have ample opportunity to read/listen, reflect, and respond to your ideas.
5. You will treat your peers with dignity and respect.
6. You will do your best to have patience with technology. There will be hiccups, expect them. We will get through them together.
7. You will give yourself grace. Expect to make mistakes. You are human and you are stressed.
8. Is there anything else you would like to add to this list?

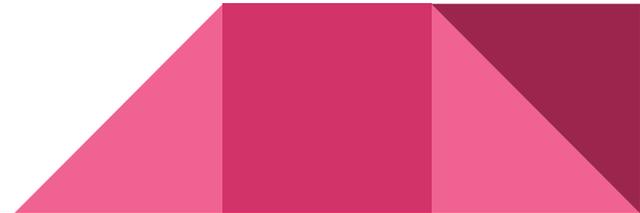
Establish Clear Expectations & Processes

- Create a Learning Pact
- Have consistent due dates & deadlines
- Send (lots of) reminders!



Adapt Active Learning for Social Distancing

- Grid for adapting active learning techniques to the socially distance learning environment from Louisiana State University: <https://tinyurl.com/yxsa5rvb>



Working & Learning Together

- Ask community members to **summarize** how they have solved a problem in text or audio format and then share it with other groups. This is a way to begin problem-solving and challenges from the learners' respective life or work environments.
- Design pairing or teaming activities and ask learners to **review others' postings and discuss their mutual reviews**.
- **Provide frequent feedback** to each learner, perhaps a weekly grade on discussion contributions or something similar.

Small Group Discussion

In your small groups, please respond to the questions here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vChhXjH6HN0aYS8UIBkGs4f2Xq4EJanTVEJvOr9rA1E/edit?usp=sharing>

(Folks who are coming later, you can check out that link for more insight and resources!)



Tools & Resources

Michelle Pacansky-Brock: <https://brocansky.com/>

The Humanizing Tool Buffet:
<http://page.teachingwithoutwalls.com/tool-buffet>

Teaching in a Time of Uncertainty:
<https://cfde.emory.edu/resources/teaching/teaching-resources/teaching-time-uncertainty.html>

Active Learning While Physical Distancing:
<https://tinyurl.com/yxsa5rvb>

Reddit Thread on Making Online Classes Better:
https://www.reddit.com/r/college/comments/hokanq/if_you_hate_online_classes_what_at_least_can_make/