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Humanizing Online Teaching

By Drs. Mary Raygoza, Raina León, and Aaminah Norris

Saint Mary's College of California

Our research and teaching praxis centers around striving to humanize education -- in the Saint Mary's Single Subject Teacher Education program, we teach a class called Humanizing Education Methods. We offer this resource based on scholarship on teaching practices for equity and social justice and our collective experiences of online and hybrid teaching. It is not centered on the technical aspects of online teaching but rather pedagogical practices that promote care for the whole student and class collective. If you have additional ideas or feedback, please email Mary Raygoza at mcr13@stmarys-ca.edu.

Building and Maintaining Beloved Community

- ★ Take time to establish norms for being present, mindful, and safe. You may bring a set of norms to students, bring a set that they then expand or provide feedback on, and/or co-create classroom norms.
 - Some examples of norms are:
 - Be present. Each class will be packed, so prepare yourself to be engaged throughout.
 - Listen deeply to whomever is speaking in the virtual room.
 - One mic. Try not to interrupt, and if you do, apologize.
 - Make space, take space.
 - Be open to learning. Be comfortable with being uncomfortable.
 - Use personal pronouns and gender-conscious language. One way to support this is through using the "Rename" function to use the name and pronouns that you would like others to use.
 - We start on time and end on time.
 - We expect your full and safe participation in our online sessions. This means being free from any distractions including driving, the consumption of drugs and/or alcohol, and/or multitasking.
 - One way to co-create norms is to ask students how we need to engage to foster a respectful, creative, rigorous classroom community; you can invite them to brainstorm in these four "directions": Student to Student, Student to Professor, Professor to Student, and Student to Self. They will have a lot of good ideas, and if they co-create norms they will be more accountable to them.
 - You, as a professor, may also have to summon a higher amount of energy to demonstrate your excitement and engagement in the class as a model for them.
 - That said, authenticity transfers across the digital platform. It's a wonderful practice to make space for co-learning and being transparent with students when you are working out technology glitches to support their learning.
- ★ Engage students in a "temperature check" at the beginning of class. You may wish to do this weekly. It is harder to tell how students are doing when you are in a virtual space, so this can help to get a read of the virtual room. It can also help students to feel more comfortable, warming up to speak online. You may get

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creative and come up with a check-in prompt that both allows students to share how they are and is related to your class content. Some general examples of temperature checks are:

- A rose and a thorn
- A high and a low
- Represent your week in an emoji or hashtag
- Share how you are doing in the form of a weather pattern or forecast
- Fist to five (fist being a ranking of zero, up to all five fingers) on how you are doing and explain why
- What is one joyful practice that is energizing you (as a student or human in the world)?
- ★ You may also invite announcements or celebrations- these are things students usually share with each other in person as they walk into a classroom, so it can be good to make intentional space for them.
- ★ Just because you are online does not mean you can't do things like mindfulness practices to center the class.
- ★ Take time for students to share appreciations with one another at the end of class, for anything big or small, related to the class or not. Again, this helps in fostering community when you are not in person.
- ★ Ask students to all use the video to help to maintain human connection. In an online environment, we can still connect through body language and eye contact, though limited.

Be Prepared

- ★ Share an agenda with learning objectives and activities for the day so students know what is coming.
 - You might ask them to have the agenda up while you are teaching so that they see your face and the agenda.
 - If you are having a guest speaker or conducting a lecture, you might also “pin” the video of that person so that the students focus on that person’s presentation primarily rather than the gallery of faces.
 - If you have breakout groups, make sure to give them a “protocol” or clear guidelines about what you want them to do. In person, we can “read” the room more easily to have an idea of which groups are struggling and move there to redirect. Remember that, they can reach out to you for more support, but you won’t have the ability to “read” the room. Circulating among groups and making sure everyone is on the same page on what they have to do (check in on task clarity before breaking out into small groups) can help a lot!
- ★ If you normally have a routine when students enter, e.g. a warm-up or “do now,” continue to do those or you may start implementing them because students will trickle into the online space.
- ★ Have an array of instructional activities; class online can be boring if it is just the professor speaking
 - Start your classes with a tech tutorial. We should not make assumptions about the intuitive abilities of students. You might even think about emphasizing one practice over others every week. While students can watch an informational video, seeing you and hearing your voice as they learn can help to make the concept stick.
 - Examples of instructional activities: Quick writes, Pair shares, Small group work, Debates, Digital gallery walks, Jigsaws, Graphic organizers, etc.
 - You can also use quick polls to gauge understanding of a concept and reteach if needed.
 - The breakout room function allows for you to automatically assign groups or manually assign groups. If you do a Google Form or survey before class, you may have a better idea of how to structure your groups.
- ★ Plan to engage students in reflective, meta-cognitive activities such as exit tickets or a Know-Want to Know-Learned chart.

Fostering Equitable Participation

- ★ Check in on access- is anyone having difficulty accessing: internet connection, a quiet space, a device, or a mic or camera? Are there ways you can support their troubleshooting, resources you can point them to? See Zoom's information on [closed captioning](#). Before you start your session, add the transcription service. You can always share these transcripts (with student permission) on your Moodle page.
 - If the topic is not privileged or sensitive, check in with students to see if they would be comfortable with recording the session and post these online. We may have students who become ill or have technical difficulties mid-session. Recordings allow those students to have access to the class at a later date.
- ★ Use the raise hand function to track who would like to speak. This may not show up for all students. Keep an eye for "tech hands" and "real hands" that you see on the screen.
 - You might even have a protocol for acknowledging hands as they come up: "Next I have [Name] and after that [Name]" as well as a protocol for students to send an individual chat to you if they have a contribution to the conversation.
 - If you have to do a roll call check-in on a topic, let students know in advance that you will be calling on everyone and give them time to think of their responses to promote equity and support in their vulnerability on the platform and with one another.
- ★ As students are sharing out, pause to invite anyone to speak who has not spoken yet.

Group Work and Group Roles

- ★ Utilize the breakout rooms function of Zoom- you can have them break into groups that are random or manually assign students to groups. Be clear about what time you will have everyone return so they know how to pace their group work. You can "float" group to group as they work, as you would around the classroom.
 - Try asking students to designate a timekeeper and build in flex time for students to figure out what they need to do.
 - Use the broadcast function to let them know when they should transition in their groups from one person to another.
 - The broadcast function is also great to use a minute or so before you "close the rooms".
- ★ Assign or have students select group roles, such as Timekeeper, Facilitator, Reporter, Recorder, and Equity Manager or Harmonizer. Groups roles increase accountability to one another and in an online format ensure that everyone participates.
- ★ Once students select group roles, ensure that the facilitator is assigned using the group break out structure.
- ★ Allow students to alternate roles so that each week they are included and provided with different responsibilities.
- ★ When you come back together, have a specific prompt of what students will be reporting out on. You may have those who share out say what they learned or appreciated from a classmate in their breakout group, so that they are not just repeating what they themselves said in the breakout group.
- ★ Ask students to create and present multimodal presentations online. This allows for students' involvement to be dynamic and engaging. It also builds their capacity to present in the online format.

Sharing Out

- ★ When you want each person in the class to have an opportunity to speak to something, ask for a volunteer of who would like to begin and when that person finishes, they say the name of another

student, “tagging” them in. This keeps the flow going and ensures everyone speaks. Before doing this, you may want to do a pair share, give them time for a quick write, or at least 30 seconds of thinking time so that they are prepared to share and not cold called or put on the spot when it is their turn.

- ★ We teach teacher candidates who are holding a lot of care and concern for the young people they teach and often experience their own trauma or secondary trauma. Students cannot give a classmate a consensual hug, just sit next to them, or grab them a tissue when online. If you teach a class where challenging topics and experiences come up, be prepared to hold space, offer validation and affirmation, create space for dialogue, and provide guidance that students need.
- ★ Utilize the screen share function. Both you and students can share your screen- you can share your whole screen or just a specific document or tab (the latter is recommended so that you do not over-share). This can be great for showing students a presentation or inviting students to present.

Other Helpful Zoom Functions

- ★ Gallery view - encourage students to use “gallery view” (AKA The Brady Brunch view) and use it yourself. This allows everyone to see everyone else at the same time. It feels more like you are all sitting in a room together, rather than just looking at the person currently speaking.
- ★ The chat function - encourage students (while adhering to the community norms of course) to use the chat function during class. You may send comments, thumbs up, etc. yourself as others are speaking. When you are not face-to-face you lose some of the “mmhmms” and brief remarks that students make as others are speaking. The chat function helps to invite this. Students may share encouragement or appreciation for one another’s ideas.

Be Flexible, Be Patient, and Be You

- ★ Technical glitches will happen. The way something was supposed to happen in-person will not go that way online. Students and faculty alike will be adapting to this new challenge. The uncertain and inequitable world is happening as your class is happening. Everyone is holding a lot. Remind yourself and students of this. We must cultivate compassion for one another and ourselves. Authenticity when glitches happen creates bridges of connection.
- ★ Take breaks - take approximately a 5 minute break per hour; encourage movement and stretching; when you do so, you can ask students to turn their camera off and then turn it back on at the end of the break time.
- ★ Log in a few minutes before class and chat informally with students as you would normally do; similarly, invite students to ask questions as others are logging off. Also, have appropriate boundaries on your time as you usually do.
- ★ Encourage students to use video conferencing to connect with one another outside of class-time. This can be helpful not only for group work but for socializing such as sharing a meal virtually, or having a virtual study session.
- ★ Bring your energy! Online learning spaces need energy!

Saint Mary’s College of California Campus Resources

[Resources for Converting an On-Campus Course to an Online Format](#)

[Student Disability Services guidance to Faculty on how to make online and remote format classrooms accessible](#)