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## Remote Teaching Updates & Resources

1 message

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**Betsy Barre** <barreea@wfu.edu>  
Reply-To: Betsy Barre <barreea@wfu.edu>  
To:

Fri, Apr 17, 2020 at 8:00 AM



# How Do I Boost Participation in My Remote Course?

By Kristi Verbeke on Apr 16, 2020 04:39 pm



Today's post is an entry in our "Ask the CAT" column. Readers can [submit questions](#) related to remote teaching and a member of the CAT will answer them publicly.

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**Dear Tabby,**

Now that we're a few weeks into the shift to remote instruction, I'm seeing dwindling numbers of students participating in my course. What can I do to encourage student engagement?

**-Lonely in Winston Salem**

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Hello Lonely,

This is a great question and one that many instructors are thinking about right now. While some of the factors contributing to your students' decrease in participation may be beyond your control, there are a few strategies you might try to boost engagement.

### *Communicating with Students*

Think about ways you might reach out and communicate with your students. We have discussed the role of surveying your students in previous posts, but it bears repeating here. Specifically, you might ask students about any challenges they are experiencing outside your class. This might provide insight on their lack of participation as well as give you an opportunity to offer support. Another simple idea is to conduct a weekly "temperature check". Examples of temperature checks include:

- A high and a low
  - Represent your week in an emoji, hashtag, or gif
  - What is one practice that is energizing you right now (as a student or human in the world)
- (Raygoza, 2020)

Be sure to establish a consistent routine when communicating with your remote students. The Announcements feature in an LMS works well for this (as does the [Google Groups email list](#) generated for each class if you would prefer to send an email directly). Consider sending out a message at the start of each new week detailing the activities and expectations for the upcoming week. A short reminder or nudge mid-week helps keep students on track and a wrap up at the end of the week is a nice way to commend them on the work they are doing.

If you're up for using additional technology, a couple of communication tools to investigate are [Remind](#) and [Slack](#). Remind allows you to send text messages to your students without sharing your phone number and Slack is a great tool for more informal types of communication. Allow students to opt-in to these tools if you decide to use them.

## *Create Opportunities for Community*

Another strategy often used by online instructors is the creation of a place where students can discuss non-content related course issues. In my online courses, I often set up two additional discussion forums (if you use other tools to communicate with students, feel free to adapt these ideas for those contexts). One is for Q&A (I title mine “Help! I have a question”. “Got a question?” is also another often used title) and another is for more social purposes (e.g., “Coffee Shop” or “Lounge”). For the Q&A forum, I instruct all students to post questions that arise there rather than asking me directly. I stress that if they have a question, it’s likely others do too and would benefit from the answer. This also saves me from having to answer the same question multiple times. With respect to the social forum, you may need to get this one going by asking some questions to get the students talking. Ideas include:

- A temperature check prompt presented above (maybe even vary them from week to week)
- What shows would you recommend for binge-watching right now?
- Books we should read (for fun!)
- Invite students to post announcements or celebrations

If you decide to use the discussion forum tool, be sure to activate email notifications so that you get an email whenever someone posts (this is particularly important for the Q&A forum) and can respond in a timely manner. Show your students how to opt-in to this feature as well so they are notified when their classmates post.

## *Check Your Presence*

Instructor presence is a critical factor for student engagement (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). Find ways to be present in your remote classroom. Several of the strategies above help you establish presence with your students. I would also encourage you to utilize audio and video whenever you can. Rather than a text-based email or announcement, create a short video. You can also embed audio and video responses into online discussions as well.

Most importantly, be authentic with students and humanize yourself. We’re all

struggling during this time. Talk about your own struggles and ways you are coping. What books, shows, and movies are giving you joy during this time? Create videos for your students and don't worry about them being perfect. One of my colleagues is fantastic at creating authentic videos where she just talks to her students about what's going on in her life and how much she misses them. Her son often pops in with a funny comment to distract her. They LOVE him (I'm hearing the same about faculty whose pets are prominently featured in videos). Her genuine communication of care for them in these videos is incredibly moving.

### *What about absent students?*

There might be a few students you are particularly concerned about. If you are having no luck connecting at all with a specific student, try sending a direct email to the student and invite them to have a 5-minute check-in conversation. You can do this through videoconferencing or even by phone (creating a number in [Google Voice](#) allows you to call, text, or message without using your personal phone number)

If that doesn't work, the Office of Academic Advising requests that faculty in the College [submit academic alerts](#) for students absent from remote class activities, displaying concerning behavior of an academic or wellbeing-related nature in remote formats, or having difficulty with remote assignments.

These are a few ideas to help keep your students engaged and cultivate community in your remote classroom. What's working for you? Share your strategies in the comments below!

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### *References*

Garrison, D. R., & Arbaugh, J. B. (2007). Researching the community of inquiry framework: Review, issues, and future directions. *Internet and Higher Education*, 10(3), 157-172.

Raygoza, León, and Norris (2020). *Humanizing Online Teaching*. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Umj2HpNZcscye2REOZPTONfKMjEvC-qBsB5NneJ-HF0/preview>.

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