Leaning into Uncertainty

Ensuring Quality Legal Education During Coronavirus

Conference Report

Roundtable 1: Beyond Zoom! Moving from Emergency Virtual Classrooms to a Rigorous, Engaging Online Experience

Drexel
UNIVERSITY

More than 400 conference registrants participated in the first roundtable, titled **"Beyond Zoom! Moving from Emergency Virtual Classrooms to a Rigorous, Engaging Online Experience,"** which was dedicated to strategizing ways to move beyond the emergency response to distance learning and move toward delivering higher-quality legal education from a distance. Each breakout group was asked to identify three techniques to ensure quality student engagement and interactivity as courses are delivered from a distance. Our goal was to help faculty find ways to inject substantial student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and student-to-content interactivity into each course, both in and outside of real-time Zoom sessions.

Many, if not most, discussions focused primarily on making Zoom time more engaging. A large percentage of suggested techniques dealt specifically with how to use small breakout groups. Comparatively few suggestions involved creating or adding specific asynchronous components (other than to note that real-time class sessions should be shortened or interspersed with outside activities beyond readings). Attendees also expressed interest in methods to build and maintain community from a distance.

Beth L. Haas, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Online Learning and Associate Professor of Law at Drexel University Thomas R. Kline School of Law, organized the roundtable. **Ellen Murphy**, Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives and Professor of Practice at Wake Forest University School of Law, and **Rebecca Purdom**, Executive Director for Graduate and Online Programs and Professor of Practice at Emory University School of Law, presented the session.

1. **Lesson planning:**

   a. Plan for each fall course to be 1/3 asynchronous, 1/3 in-person, and 1/3 synchronous online so that moving online, if necessary, after the start of the semester, will not be too disruptive;
   b. Provide an agenda for each class session;
   c. Provide students with slides, questions, directed readings, and hypotheticals ahead of real-time virtual classes. Post background information before class to free up more class time for breakout groups and discussion;
   d. Have students send questions to guide discussion before the start of class;
   e. Ask students who did well in the class to help to prepare the fall class; and
   f. Practice Zoom techniques with colleagues ahead of class time.

2. **Increasing engagement during real-time virtual sessions:**

   a. General Thoughts
       i. "Pay attention to how long you are asking them to pay attention";
       ii. Set guidelines for use of Zoom and adhere to those guidelines;
       iii. It's okay to spoon-feed a little more law and then have the students spend more time practicing application and analysis and solving problems; and
       iv. Make sure to have proper lighting and dress properly for class. Require students to dress appropriately, too.
   b. Presentation of Material
       i. Make your hand gestures visible on webcam;
       ii. Choose the most appropriate visual form for the material;
       iii. Use a lot of problems and prompts;
       iv. Use simulations as opportunities to let students and faculty make mistakes with support and collaborative input to improve, as a team of lawyers would;
       v. Use TAs or RAs to monitor the chat function for questions;
       vi. Use videos with engaging visuals, like cartoons, to demonstrate concepts;
       vii. Have students prepare and present their own hypotheticals to the class;
       viii. Have students roleplay;
       ix. Use a big iPad; make it a co-host; write notes on it and show the students. Maybe a school could get a few and parcel out as loaners. The iPad can join as a separate entity, and students can "Pin" it to see the iPad information;
       x. Have students play review trivia games, or otherwise "gamify" elements of class;
       xi. Give students a break (e.g., take a minute to write 2-3 sentences to reflect or respond to a prompt);
       xii. Use the whiteboard function in Zoom;
       xiii. Increase policy discussions, as they may be especially engaging;
       xiv. Use humor;
       xv. Incorporate current events/COVID-19 into the subject matter of the class (ex. environmental justice clinic);

     xvi.   Changing the grading system (not P/F) could possibly help with engagement;

    xvii.   Record the Zoom lessons because students may be distracted and need to revisit the lesson;

   xviii.   Use a shared Google document for note taking during class discussions and make it available to all students. Use a shared Google document to document discussions of breakout groups; and

    xix.   Use Center for Computer-Assisted Instruction (CALI) materials in class.

c. Calling on Students/Responding to Questions

    i.   Use the Socratic method but inform students prior to class that they will be called on;

    ii.   Encourage use of the hand-raise function and limited chat use in a large classroom setting;

   iii.   Call on a larger number of students;

   iv.   Highlight the speaker when a student is presenting;

    v.   Call on students and put them on the spot to prevent zoning out and multi-tasking;

   vi.   Pin the student who is being called on while they respond so it is easier for peers to see them. Encourage students to use gallery view on Zoom; and

   vii.   Designate the chat for questions, not discussion, as too much chat traffic can be distracting.

d. Compensating for Missing Visual Cues

    i.   Use polling apps to have students or groups weigh in early and often (Top Hat, Kahoot!, and ExamSoft/ExamNow);

    ii.   Check in with individual students to see who is struggling; and

   iii.   Add extra virtual office hours.

e. Attendance Concerns

    i.   Have students complete entry and/or exit tickets for each class, and

    ii.   Ask students to periodically check in on the chat by typing a word or their name.

3. Adding content and interactivity outside of real-time virtual class time:

a. Use low-stakes formative assessments and quizzing to test content knowledge in between real-time class sessions;

b. Have students prepare 2-3-minute videos to teach a course topic and post the videos on Blackboard or another platform;

c. Invite alumni, practitioners, or other special guests to join the Zoom meeting. Send the speaker questions ahead of time;

d. Create a virtual scavenger hunt for students to do in or outside of class. Use the chat feature or another platform and have students complete the activity in 15-20 minutes;

e. Create a class Instagram account to share things like children and pets, cooking, entertainment, and other slices of life in quarantine;

f. Ask bar director and publishers for problems to use in online classes; use Adaptibar questions to reinforce content and engage student work;

g. Record lectures for students to watch outside of class time and use class time on Zoom for discussion and problems. (If recording lectures, make them short, e.g., seven minutes and/or limited to one concept);

h. Use a discussion board to encourage all students to participate, including those who may feel less comfortable in the asynchronous setting or those who have Internet connectivity issues;

i. Use LMS for live chat and forums and require students to respond to other students' postings;

j. Use the discussion feature on Blackboard to share drafts of student papers. Require students to post a certain number of comments on colleagues' papers; and

k. Voice threads on Blackboard allow for multi-media sharing from students and faculty. They also allow for direct responses to posts using audio and video messages by everyone on the classroom.

4. **Building community**:

a. Encourage or require students to share personalized video introductions of themselves;

b. Have students virtually interview each other and introduce their partner to the class;

c. Make sure students have a virtual lounge space. This can be a dedicated Zoom space or a dedicated discussion board area that serves as both a lounge and a hallway for spontaneous discussion about courses or anything else;

d. Connect with students before the start of class;

e. Keep cameras on and tell students to turn off self-view to keep them focused on others instead of how they look on camera;

f. Keep your webcam on and show your face in the corner when giving an asynchronous PowerPoint lecture;

g. Create fun groups of students (ex. Harry Potter houses, law firms) and allocate points;

h. Hold optional coffee chats/happy hours with students and professor, especially in Legal Writing classes;

i. Allow students to have a "pet parade" showing off their pets or show-and-tell (something like a favorite concert t-shirt);

j. Do an icebreaker. (e.g., share your quarantine-name. Your first name is how you are feeling; your last name is the last thing you ate); and

k. Use Lextern (lexternweb.org).

5. **Handling large classes and using breakout groups effectively:**

a. Have classes of 30 or fewer students when possible;

b. Break larger classes into smaller sections if possible;

c. Move amongst breakout groups while students are working in them to answer questions and keep students on task;

d. Have TAs or RAs handle breakout group discussions in a recitation format;

e. Have students report back on what they discussed in breakout groups;

f. Have students edit or draft a document in breakout groups;

g. Randomize the way you put students in breakout groups and elect class or group leaders; and

h. Utilize breakout rooms with a directed assignment like a worksheet that must be completed and uploaded later.

6. **Incorporating student-to-student interaction (see Building Community section):**

   a. Have students do peer assessment of each other's work with a reference model answer;
   b. Nominate a student as the scribe or leader of a discussion to facilitate participation;
   c. Have students present and teach to each other;
   d. Create a shared Google document, OneDrive, or similar sharing platform for real-time collaboration;
   e. Use Microsoft Teams to work collectively/allow for live edits to promote better legal writing or to provide structure to an outline of strategic approaches; and
   f. Prior to each class, allow students 15 minutes of chat time in the classroom without the professor present.

7. **Incorporating faculty-to-student interaction:**

   a. Hold virtual office hours and have students sign up for appointments on Google or Doodle;
   b. Hold review sessions with small groups of students to review new material;
   c. Have students submit answers to problem to the professor via private chat to determine which students are struggling and who to call on; and
   d. Make individual phone calls or emails to students to check in.

8. **Sharing the load:**

   a. Share material, especially quizzes and small assessments, across sections of the same course;
   b. Collaborate with faculty at other schools and divide the work; and
   c. Invite guest lecturers (colleagues or outsiders) to give the students a break from you.

9. **The 1L experience (see Building community section):**

   a. Hire paid mentors for 1L fall students. Mentors can have weekly chats/meetings with their students to aid social and academic adjustment.

10. **Technology, training, and administration:**

   a. Set technology requirements when students enter 1L;
   b. Have technical support available in the Zoom room when possible;
   c. Have experts on virtual instruction train and meet with professors;
   d. Have TA hold a practice breakout session for students;
   e. Put structures in place for students who need additional support;
   f. Provide extra time on the clock for faculty in the development pipeline; and
   g. Don't have students learn 15 different tools; everyone needs to use the same tools.

11. **Miscellaneous:**

   a. Emphasize connection between what students are learning virtually and what lawyers are doing now virtually and will be doing in the future;

b. Follow up with students who appeared to be unprepared or unresponsive; and
c. Make university counseling information readily available.

Conference Planning Committee:

Susan Brooks (Drexel University Kline School of Law)

Benjamin Cooper (University of Mississippi School of Law)

Barry Currier (American Bar Association)

Darby Dickerson (UIC John Marshall Law School and President, AALS)

Dan Filler (Drexel University Kline School of Law)

Alex Geisinger (Drexel University Kline School of Law)

Beth Haas (Drexel University Kline School of Law)

Melanie Leslie (Cardozo School of Law)

Kimberly Mutcherson (Rutgers Law School)

Zahr Said (University of Washington School of Law)

Emily Scivoletto (UC Davis School of Law)