

CELT Teaching Tip • January 28, 2021

Why don't they attend? 12 ways to boost student participation in synchronous sessions

Attendance expectations continue to be challenging due to Covid-19. In the fall semester, we heard from students that they needed and appreciated the flexibility in accessing lecture material; however, they sought more in-real-time experiences. We also heard from instructors that offered many synchronous opportunities but that students sparsely attended these. We gathered the following strategies for encouraging participation and attendance from the CELT Advisory Board, CELT Staff, and colleagues across campus.

Before each synchronous class session -- connect with your students.

- **Communicate the logistics.** Announce the when, where, and how the synchronous session will occur (see the Canvas announcements guide, <https://bit.ly/2Xlw5k8>). For students in 3-5 courses, this simple reminder can be more helpful than you realize.
- **Create an introductory "video postcard."** Before the synchronous session, create a brief recorded video (see the Studio (Canvas) page, <https://bit.ly/2yCDCrK>) focusing on its objectives. You can post this introduction for students to review before and after the live session. You can share the videos as a part of the logistical announcements; see the embed Studio media in a course guide (<https://bit.ly/3a8GhIC>).
- **Recognize students need support.** With the ongoing pandemic, students continue to need access to wellness support. Consider the many resources on the creating a Community of "Cyclones Care" page (<https://bit.ly/3iSEBa0>), including adding a student health and wellness statement (<https://bit.ly/3qUjhnM>) to your syllabus or sharing content from the Student Health and Wellness website (<https://www.studentwellness.iastate.edu/>).

During the synchronous session -- encourage attention.

- **Check-in with your students.** Start each session with an agenda slide to know what is coming and have a moment to gather necessary materials. As they log in, ask students a question of the day via the polling function in Webex or Zoom. Or share a Word Cloud that changes shape in front of their eyes. Create a one-question survey in Qualtrics, focus the question on the content, such as one word to describe the most recent class reading or a check-in regarding their current mood. Display the word cloud results (<https://bit.ly/39vLnOQ>) in real-time or share them during the next class session using the Engage students with a Qualtrics word cloud in your course guide (<http://bit.ly/3a7N2ui>).
- **Make it meaningful.** Why just read class notes or review the textbook material during a live session? Provide an experience that necessitates their attendance. Perhaps this is case-based learning, small group discussions in breakout rooms, or working on challenging problems.
- **Clarify.** Identify common mistakes or errors from homework problems and offer a mini-lesson with a similar situation that students can take then-and-there. This step can provide valuable feedback to both students and you as the instructor – what are they still not understanding?

- **Motivate.** Start the session with a mini quiz drawn from the last session's material. If for points, this can provide a small incentive to attend and provide valuable information regarding their current knowledge.
- **Engage.** Share a document to take collaborative notes and emphasize these notes could be used for open-book exams by all, so the more attendees, the better and more precise the notes.
- **Invite guest speakers.** Both Evrim Baran, School of Education, and Elizabeth Stegemoller, Kinesiology, invite guest speakers to the synchronous sessions to connect students with professionals working in various settings (e.g., industry, academia, schools, etc.). They both carefully aligned the speakers with the current week's focus and activities.
- **Incentivize proactiveness.** Melissa Tropf, Veterinary Clinical Sciences, taught a class with all asynchronous lectures (pre-recorded) and weekly virtual synchronous review sessions and labs. Weekly quizzes incentivized students to stay current with the asynchronous material and come prepared for the live sessions. When Tropf reached out to students who struggled in the synchronous sessions, they shared that they were behind in their asynchronous material, inhibiting their ability/willingness to engage in the synchronous sessions. Students appreciated the accountability measures.

Closing a synchronous session -- share highlights.

- **Finish a session with an exit ticket.** Ask students to share one thing they have a better understanding of today's class meeting. Save the chat transcript in Webex for tracking purposes. Sharing the chat and increasing student clarity encourage other students to attend future sessions (see the Save a meeting chat guide, <https://bit.ly/3qX2z6N>).
- **To record or not record?** Some faculty shared that they upload a recorded version of the live synchronous session. Others stated that they synchronize sessions so engaging and tailored to the specific experience they do not record and upload. Instead, they provide a synopsis document or short video sharing content, clarifying questions, reminders, and highlighting positive trends (e.g., lots of students submitted work on time, the discussion board is very active, etc.).

As we continue to endure the pandemic, flexibility is vital (see the Be Flexible page, <https://bit.ly/celt-flexible>). However, finding ways to ensure the students are aware of the sessions, making them interactive, collaborative, and timely, can go a long way towards encouraging participation. For more ideas, tips, and strategies, check out CELT's Engaging students online page (<https://bit.ly/celt-engage>).

With a joy for teaching,
Sara Marchetti, Director
Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching

Stay up to date COVID-19 Communications and Planning (Academic Affairs)

Review and bookmark the Academic Affairs Division-Wide Communications page (<https://bit.ly/3aa8s9Z>).

Instructional Tools News and Updates

Did you remove the yellow highlights in the course template?

If you choose to use the ISU Course Template (<https://bit.ly/isu-template>), **remove all yellow highlighting** – this emphasis serves as instructor prompts to edit, remove, or add content.

What to do: “Your Webex Authorization has expired. Please reauthorize Webex.”

When trying to schedule a meeting or office hours in Webex on Canvas, you may receive a message “Your Webex Authorization has expired. Please reauthorize Webex” follow the troubleshooting steps on the Cisco Webex Meetings: Troubleshooting the “Reauthorize Webex” Error page (<http://bit.ly/3qRZR2k>).

Anonymous grading in Canvas now enabled

You can now allow anonymous grading and anonymous annotation of student submissions in Canvas assignments. See how via this anonymous grading post (<https://bit.ly/3t4Qle6>).

Stay up to date on ISU-approved learning technologies

Bookmark CELT's Instructional Tools News & Updates page (<https://bit.ly/35g7KqL>). Questions about these updates? Email celt-help@iastate.edu.

Explore the new Breakout Sessions feature in Webex Meetings

Webex Breakout Sessions is an excellent way for students to meet in small groups to collaborate and share ideas using live video streaming, screen sharing, etc. You can choose to assign students automatically or manually to a breakout, move or exchange students if needed, and even rename/add/delete a breakout during the meeting. While students are in the sessions, they can request help, and you can respond to them directly or broadcast messages to everyone, join/leave each session to contribute, and control when students return to the main meeting. To get started, use CELT's Webex Breakout Sessions page (<https://bit.ly/3iTQQDI>).

How can I make my video lectures effective and engaging?

The impersonal, text-heavy nature of many online classrooms makes it challenging for instructors to engage students with course material in an interesting, meaningful way. But, for students to benefit from a video lecture, they must be willing to watch it. This 20-Minute Mentor provides guidance for designing and delivering engaging video lectures that are effective in the unique context of the online classroom. To get started follow the steps on the How can I make my video lectures effective and engaging? Post (<https://bit.ly/2KUkr2Z>).

CELT Teaching Spotlight: Grant Thompson

Dr. Grant Thompson, Assistant Professor, Department of Horticulture has spent two years teaching at Iowa State University (See Thompson's Horticulture page, <https://bit.ly/2KUi2Fv>). Recently, Thompson received the Excellence in Remote Instruction COVID-19 Exceptional Effort Awards (<https://bit.ly/39wljSj>) for, “outstanding virtual delivery of HORT 240: Landscape Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines, and for enduring improvements to student accommodations.”

Thompson’s advice for teaching:

For most of my horticulture courses, we focus on hands-on learning outside on-campus as we study different trees, shrubs, and ways to manage them. The pandemic and need for remote learning caused me to reconsider my courses and develop means for students to move back and forth from in-person to remote learning on short notice. I thought of this as a continuum of participation depending on the student’s situation: entirely in-person, able to be on-campus but outside of regular class meetings, and students fully remote, including being away from Ames. This change posed a particular challenge for my woody plant identification class that traditionally relies on seeing plants in person and engaging as many senses as possible to recognize each species correctly.

Fortunately, many options for helping students with remote learning also increased the accessibility of the course for

students needing academic accommodations. Modifications to how I presented content resulted in win-wins and will impact long after the pandemic passes.

- **Short videos are highly accessible.** We used a still camera, smartphone video, and a GoPro to capture plants' imagery in the landscape and our labs on campus. After light editing, we posted videos to Canvas Studio or YouTube that compressed large-high-quality videos to smaller sizes that were easily streamed and viewed on phones, tablets, and computers. Students appreciated being able to watch on-the-go, on campus in front of the plants, or from home, along with the ability to re-watch or slow videos as needed.
- **Auto-captioning for videos is useful for many end-users.** Captions generated by Canvas Studio and YouTube aren't perfect, but editing is available. Regardless, captions can help connect visuals to terminology, assist English language learners, distracted students, and students with auditory challenges. After uploading videos, captioning is a few clicks away.
- **Content in multiple formats gives students choices for how they learn best.** In Canvas, we provided still slides of plants, short descriptive videos that focused on significant morphological features, and scans of preserved herbarium specimens. Each format had strengths and weaknesses, but in combination, students could use what they found useful to strengthen their recall and conduct self-assessments.
- **Consider ways to increase engagement asynchronously.** We provided maps of our plant walks for students to retrace after class or do outside of class if needed. This resource provided flexibility for students that needed to be socially distant but is useful for students with mobility concerns that could take a self-paced walk or use various parking locations to better access portions of the walks.

These strategies worked for our course and gave students the resources to learn on their terms and at times conducive to their schedules and ability to be present in class. It's my preference as an instructor to have all students in class and on our plant walks. I have found that given different student circumstances and learning styles, I can meet students where they are and accommodate more students by offering my content in multiple synchronous and asynchronous ways. Ultimately, that helps me achieve my intended goal – to guide students in becoming self-driven learners and understand my courses' content.

Is there a CELT program, series, event would you recommend?

I found the CELT Teaching Partners Program page (<http://bit.ly/celt-tpp>) and the SoTL Scholars program page (<http://bit.ly/celt-sotl>) helpful in my development as an educator.

Upcoming CELT 2021 Programming

CELT offers face-to-face one-off workshops/webinars, longer-term teaching and learning circles on selected topics, and facilitation of teaching and learning communities. Our program listing with descriptions and registration information may be found on the corresponding page on CELT's event listed via ISU's Events Calendar (<http://bit.ly/celtevents>) or CELT's programming schedule via ISU's Events Calendar website (<http://bit.ly/celt-isu-events>).

Know where to go at ISU

For help with the Canvas, contact Canvas Support via the ?Help menu in Canvas:

- All 24/7 support options may be found by clicking the ? Help icon (found on the left-hand navigation bar in Canvas <https://canvas.iastate.edu/>) to access the support available to you:
- 24/7 phone support. Call 515-294-4000, then follow the prompts to connect with Canvas support.
- Find answers to common questions in the Canvas Instructor Guides (<http://bit.ly/38M9BC2>).

- Use the resources in the Canvas @ ISU site (<https://bit.ly/canvas-isu>)

For technical support, contact the ISU Solution Center:

- Email solution@iastate.edu
- Call 515-294-4000 and follow the prompts to receive support from Solution Center staff

Receive one-to-one assistance for teaching with technology with the CELT Response Team,

- The **CELT Response Team** is available for consultations Tuesday-Friday from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. each day. To request assistance, call the Team at 515-294-5357.
- You may connect with our CELT instructional designers for support or pedagogical consultations by emailing your course title, describing the question or issues you have, and the steps to replicate it to celt-help@iastate.edu. This step will also create a ServiceNow ticket for easy tracking.
- Additionally, you may wish to contact one of the support units directly. Please note which program, department, or college each unit serves and contact the unit for your area (<http://bit.ly/isu-support>).

CELT Mission and Contact Information

CELT's mission is "Partnering with educators to advance student-centered learning at Iowa State University." Contact us for consultations, questions, and comments via phone: 515-294-5357, email: celt@iastate.edu, or on our website: <http://www.celt.iastate.edu/>. Our physical office is in 3024 Morrill Hall, 603 Morrill Road, Ames, IA 50011-2100

How to contact us

Contact CELT via email at celt@iastate.edu or call 515-294-5357. We will forward your information to the appropriate staff member or contact the CELT staff directly (<https://bit.ly/celt-staff>) to schedule a meeting in a safe manner (virtually or face-to-face social-distanced).

Questions about teaching with technology?

Connect with our CELT instructional designers for support or pedagogical consultations by emailing celt-help@iastate.edu; this will also create a ServiceNow ticket for easy tracking.