

first name, refer to comments they previously made in discussion posts, mention if you previously had them in a face-to-face class, and make sure that the feedback you provide on assignments feels personal.

Provide Opportunities for Interaction

Building rapport is not a one-way street; ensure that students have opportunities to also interact with you. Be present in discussion boards, hold Q&A sessions, distribute a midterm survey in which

Technology can make connecting with students easier—tools such as mail merge simplify sending personal emails and Zoom can be great for holding office hours—but, in the end, what really makes a difference to our students is a personal connection.

students can provide anonymous feedback on how the course is going, and allow students to vote on subtopics or case studies for upcoming lectures. Think creatively about ways to engage students in the online environment.

Be Compassionate

Combine a pandemic, an economic recession, and many highly visible instances of violent racism, and it is likely that our students are experiencing trauma in their life outside of the classroom. Consider asking about the challenges they foresee at the beginning of the semester and follow up to ask how they are doing and how you can help. If you notice missed deadlines or reduced attendance, check in by email, telephone, or text. Consider sending personal email reminders before assignment due dates or adopting a flexible deadline calendar.

Final Thoughts

Holding synchronous classes via videoconference may seem like a perfect way to connect with students, but it takes care and thoughtfulness to ensure that this format is not impersonal and isolating. Synchronous discussions or reviews can build community; however, we are deluding ourselves if we think we are connecting with students who log on just to be lectured at with their cameras off and their microphones muted.

The most important component of building rapport is authenticity. Decide what will work best depending on your teaching style, course load, and class size. It is more difficult to build meaningful relationships across the digital divide. Technology can make connecting with students easier—tools such as mail merge simplify sending personal emails and Zoom can be great for holding office hours—but, in the end, what really makes a difference to our students is a personal connection. ■

REFERENCES

- Amelink, Catherine T. 2005. "Predicting Academic Success Among First-Year, First Generation Students." Blacksburg: Virginia Polytechnic Institute. PhD dissertation, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.
- Anaya, Guadalupe, and Darnell G. Cole. 2001. "Latina/o Student Achievement: Exploring the Influence of Student-Faculty Interactions on College Grades." *Journal of College Student Development* 42 (1): 3-14.
- Aragon, Steven R. 2003. "Creating Social Presence in Online Environments." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 100:57-68.

- Delaney, Anne Marie. 2008. "Why Faculty-Student Interaction Matters in the First-Year Experience." *Tertiary Education and Management* 14 (3): 227-41.
- Gering, Carol S., Dani K. Sheppard, Barbara L. Adams, Susan L. Renes, and Allan A. Morotti. 2018. "Strengths-Based Analysis of Student Success in Online Courses." *Online Learning* 22 (3): 55-85.
- Glazier, Rebecca A. 2016. "Building Rapport to Improve Retention and Success in Online Classes." *Journal of Political Science Education* 12 (4): 437-56.
- Ishiyama, John. 2002. "Does Early Participation in Undergraduate Research Benefit Social Science and Humanities Students?" *College Student Journal* 36 (3): 380-86.
- Jaggars, Shanna Smith, and Di Xu. 2016. "How Do Online Course Design Features Influence Student Performance?" *Computers & Education* 95 (April): 270-84.

- Kezar, Adrianna, and Dan Maxey. 2014. "Faculty Matter: So Why Doesn't Everyone Think So?" *Thought & Action* Fall 2014:29-44.
- Kuh, George D., and Shouping Hu. 2001. "The Effects of Student-Faculty Interaction in the 1990s." *Review of Higher Education* 24 (3): 309-32.
- Muljana, Pauline S., and Tian Luo. 2019. "Factors Contributing to Student Retention in Online Learning and Recommended Strategies for Improvement: A Systematic Literature Review." *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research* 18: 19-57. Available at doi: 10.28945/4182.
- Nistor, Nicolae, and Katrin Neubauer. 2010. "From Participation to Dropout: Quantitative Participation Patterns in Online University Courses." *Computers & Education* 55 (2): 663-72.
- Pacansky-Brock, Michelle, Michael Smedshammer, and Kim Vincent-Layton. 2020. "Humanizing Online Teaching to Equitize Higher Education." *Current Issues in Education* 21 (2): 1-20.
- Strayhorn, Terrell Lamont, and Melvin Cleveland Terrell. 2007. "Mentoring and Satisfaction with College for Black Students." *Negro Educational Review* 58 (1-2): 69-83.

FORCED EXPERIMENTATION: TEACHING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ONLINE AMID COVID-19

Taiyi Sun, *Christopher Newport University*

DOI:10.1017/S1049096520001559

Challenges from COVID-19 were especially severe for teaching classes about civic engagement and organizing. Students who were previously instructed to practice the knowledge and skills learned in their communities were forced to move to e-learning. How can instructors teach civic engagement through distance learning? This article uses a class I taught during spring 2020, "People Power Change: Leadership as a Practice," to demonstrate the use of a "three-H approach." This approach focused on students' head, heart, and hands through public narratives, strategizing, and taking action while also reexamining disruptions as opportunities.

The costs associated with decision making could cause students to settle in inertia without continually searching for the optimal state (Porter 1991), particularly when there is no external stimulus (Carden and Wood 2018). External shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, provided excellent opportunities for experimentation, innovation, and re-optimization (Acuto 2020; Dias et al. 2020), especially when previously devised plans were no longer viable.

In this course, which originated from Dr. Marshall Ganz's famous organizing class at the Harvard Kennedy School of

Government, 17 first- to third-year students were divided into five teams. They were asked to accept responsibility for enabling others to achieve a shared purpose in the face of uncertainty and to make real changes in the world (Ganz 2012). Students were required to build social capital and create leadership teams, strategize to devise actionable plans, and then execute those plans outside of the classroom. Merely studying the course material would not be sufficient; they needed to “get their hands dirty.”

Before COVID-19 forced our school to move all teaching online, all but one leadership team in the class had planned their activities on campus; the remaining team had envisioned a project that empowered the local community beyond the university. Then COVID-19 shut down the university and forced us to switch to remote e-learning. All teams commented in their mid-term and end-of-semester feedback that their original project became unviable: they had to change to organizing online. The arguments against organizing online include that it lacks “strong-ties,” lacks “hierarchical structures and central authority,” and people may not be able to achieve systematic change when they do not get their hands “dirty” (Gladwell 2010). However, the forced experimentation of having to organize online was transformative for my students and proved that any shortcomings could be overcome.

Seizing new opportunities in the face of crisis, students were asked to revise their plans from three perspectives: reenergizing emotional capacity, re-strategizing, and adjusting implementations with new skill sets. I called this the “three-H approach” because the pedagogical intervention tackled the heart, head, and hands.

The “heart” intervention involved the reconstruction of shared experiences and urgency. Each leadership team was asked to incorporate the challenges caused by COVID-19 into its “story of us”—a story that captured the common challenges the team faced, shared choices, and outcomes it achieved together that empowered team members to overcome new challenges. The process of reconstructing the “story of us” also internalized the COVID-19-related challenges such that these problems were no longer action inhibitors but became instead action motivators. COVID-19 also changed the

The “hands” intervention equipped students with new skill sets and asked them to exercise those skills when implementing their project. This involved coaching their actions; guiding virtual relationship-building sessions so that trust and norms of reciprocity could be established within leadership teams and between the leadership team and their constituency; and having online team-building sessions.

All teams made significant adjustments to their project after these pedagogical interventions. One group, which previously planned to help a few local small businesses, completely abandoned their original project when they realized the more urgent problem was the lack of exercise and the subsequent health problems caused by quarantining. As they reconstructed their shared experiences, they realized that they were no longer exercising and were feeling worse as a result. Thus, by strategizing to use the Internet as a resource and tapping into individuals’ capacity to exercise at home, they decided to ask people to “walk with us,” post their steps online, and aim to take more steps together than the number of COVID-19 cases. They also used the new skill sets learned while implementing the project, including virtual coaching and relationship building. Within a few days, a community with solidarity was emerging, and participants had the sense of “beating COVID-19” as they took more steps than new cases. Within a week, their campaign reached participants in 16 countries and 23 US states, with about 2.4 million total steps taken. Core team members commented at the end of the semester that they would never have pursued this project had there not been COVID-19, and they felt encouraged and empowered.

The forced experimentation triggered by COVID-19 made students realize that online organizing also could be successful. Instead of thinking locally and acting in typical ways, students found that the disruptions made them absorb the principles of civic engagement and successfully apply them under new conditions (Brandzell 2010).

It is important to point out that moving online did not devalue in-person organizing. All teams expressed that they planned to continue their project when we return to campus after COVID-19. The forced experimentation made them more willing to explore

Instead of thinking locally and acting in typical ways, students found that the disruptions made them absorb the principles of civic engagement and successfully apply them under new conditions.

priorities of students and their leadership teams, resulting in previously nonurgent issues becoming urgent. Students were asked to rethink their “story of now” to bring urgency to the problems on which they intended to work, especially those that were COVID-19-related so that they experienced the emotional capacity needed for their project.

The “head” intervention encompassed the re-strategizing of their theories of change. This intervention asked students to use new resources (whether physical or virtual, emotional, or material) and to turn them into additional power so that they could achieve the change they wanted. COVID-19 pushed students to reorient their attention to the virtual world and to maximize the utilities they could obtain by using relevant resources.

possibilities that they previously would not have considered or dared to try. Those experiences could strengthen the emancipatory post-pandemic pedagogy (Murphy 2020) and encourage students to combine virtual and physical organizing in their future civic-engagement endeavors.

The three-H intervention is replicable not only when we are faced with other types of disruptions because managing risks and uncertainties is now part of the built-in teachable moments. It also would work well for both fully offline and online courses as the mentality of “disruptions as opportunities” is internalized and normalized upfront. The students’ projects during COVID-19 undoubtedly will be good examples to inspire future students and their civic-engagement endeavors. ■

REFERENCES

- Acuto, Michele. 2020. "COVID-19: Lessons for an Urban(izing) World." *One Earth* April:317–19.
- Brandzell, Ben. 2010. "What Malcolm Gladwell Missed about Online Organizing and Creating Big Change." *The Nation*, November 15.
- Carden, Lucas, and Wendy Wood. 2018. "Habit Formation and Change." *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 20:117–22.
- Dias, Monica Costa, Christine Farquharson, Rachel Griffith, Robert Joyce, and Peter Levell. 2020. *Getting People Back into Work*. Institute for Fiscal Studies, Briefing Note BN 286, May.
- Ganz, Marshall. 2012. "Structuring Leadership." *MLD 377: Organizing: People, Power & Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School of Government.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. 2010. "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted." *The New Yorker*, October 4.
- Murphy, Michael P. A. 2020. "COVID-19 and Emergency eLearning: Consequences of the Securitization of Higher Education for Post-Pandemic Pedagogy." *Contemporary Security Policy*, 492–505. Available at doi: 10.1080/13523260.2020.1761749.
- Porter, Michael E. 1991. "America's Green Strategy." *Scientific American* 264:168.

NOT ALL PAIN IS GAIN: LESSONS FROM TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING ONLINE

John LaForest Phillips, *Austin Peay State University*

DOI:10.1017/S1049096520001584

Those who teach political science—especially those like me who teach political theory—overwhelmingly see critical thinking (CT) as one of their priority learning outcomes (Moore 2011). Much of the conversation about stimulating CT in the virtual classroom focuses on discussion boards and interaction more broadly. Nearly everyone agrees that discussion, properly conducted, can help students develop CT (Williams and Lahman 2011). But is there any more that can be done?

Discussions can disappoint. It does not always seem like students make connections between—or inferences from—the assigned materials. There are two possible but conflicting responses to this state of affairs. Instructors can try to add material and assignments to stimulate CT, or they can scale back and try to focus student attention on a narrower range of materials and assignments.

Literature

Most conceptualizations of CT converge on the idea that it involves "an individual's capability to [...] identify central issues and assumptions in an argument, recognize important relationships, make correct references from the data, deduce conclusions from information or data provided, interpret whether conclusions are warranted based on given data, evaluate evidence of authority, make self-corrections, and solve problems" (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005, 156).

One commonly advanced strategy to develop student CT is known as "scaffolding." This entails using targeted assignments to help students break down complex judgments into a series of simpler ones punctuated by guided feedback before asking them to tackle more complex types of reflection (Sharma and Hannafin 2004; van de Pol, Volman, and Beishuizen 2010).

Adding assignments online (scaffolded or otherwise) also has been shown to motivate students to complete assigned readings,

increase participation in class discussion, and improve performance on exams (Brothen and Wambach 2004; Johnson and Kiviniemi 2009). In brief, more is better.

This view is not universally endorsed, however. Some advocate a "less-is-more" approach. The idea is to "shift from a broader focus on 'coverage' of a variety of types of document and concepts to deeper focus on a more narrow range of topics and/or assignments" (Skurat Harris, Nier-Weber, and Borgman 2016, 19).

The rationale for adopting a more minimalist approach stems from the unique characteristics of the online medium. Communication is more uncertain in online courses. Students may not choose to click on all the available course materials. The more materials there are, the higher the likelihood that something important will be missed. Furthermore, because the online environment is usually text based, if students do not read as well as they should (or professors do not write as clearly as they think they do), the potential for miscommunication may be greater. Finally, waiting for an email response to a query takes time; students may not seek clarification if they do not believe an answer will be forthcoming in a convenient time frame.

Advocates of the minimalist approach stress the need to declutter online courses, extend the period between deadlines, and focus scarce student attention on a limited quantity of materials and assignments.

Method and Data

I teach an introductory course in political theory required for political science majors at a midsize American public university.¹ For the past eight years, I have collected a dataset consisting of essays scored for their CT using a rubric adapted from the Washington State University Critical Thinking Initiative (Condon and Kelly-Riley 2004).²

During this time, both minimalist and more scaffolded approaches were sometimes adopted. Scaffolded semesters were identified by the presence of specifically designed scaffolding exercises. Minimalist semesters were identified by the small number of required assignments (i.e., fewer than seven). Anything else was put into a residual category. Although the selection criteria are simple, table 1 shows that they align well with other dimensions of the concepts.

The scaffolded semesters have more assignments, more specific scaffolding assignments, more scaffolded CT quiz questions, more quiz questions overall, a greater variety of reading assignments, more required discussion, and more assignments with individualized feedback. The semesters with a minimalist approach have less of all of these elements. The residual category usually falls in between these two approaches. Space does not permit a discussion of the specific types of scaffolding exercises used, but several are discussed elsewhere (see Phillips 2018). Table 1 also shows that sections using the different approaches are not statistically different in terms of academic qualifications of students.

Summary of Findings

Overall, there were no statistically significant differences in mean CT scores across the three different types of semesters (table 2). The extra work that went into scaffolding online classes yielded no aggregate dividends in terms of measured CT. Table 2