

# Engagement, Disengagement, and Managing Conversations Teaching Remotely: Shared Experiences

Summary of virtual panel event held on October 22nd, 2020  
[\[Link to video\]](#)



In a synchronous classroom environment, there are many considerations for instructors while they are teaching remotely. It can be incredibly rewarding to have real-time student engagement in content through discussions, but it can also be overwhelming to juggle multiple screens, chats, video/audio, accessibility considerations, privacy/recording concerns, and more.

## Panelists:

**Jodey Nurse:** L. R. Wilson Assistant Professor at the Wilson Institute for Canadian History.

**Sandra VanderKaay:** Post-doctoral fellow at CanChild in the School of Rehabilitation Science.

**Nikol Piskuric:** Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour (PNB) and School of Interdisciplinary Science (SIS).

**Mat Savelli:** Undergraduate Chair and Assistant (Teaching) Professor in the Dept of Health, Aging, and Society and the Arts & Science Program.

## Panel Questions:

What are some of the challenges you've faced to engage with students in synchronous remote learning environments?

What strategies have you used to facilitate student engagement in your online teaching?

What suggestions do you have for other instructors who are struggling to manage student engagement and online conversations?

Is there a way to move beyond online proctoring? If so, how? What are the alternatives?

## 5 Key Takeaways from the panel

1. Online learning can cause disconnect and discomfort among students. It is important for instructors to regularly engage with their students and provide additional support on Avenue to Learn such as checklists and calendars to assist with time management. [17:00-17:30]
2. It is important for instructors to explicitly acknowledge how difficult this transition is for students and communicate this during lecture. This provides students with comfort and helps alleviate barriers between faculty and students. [26:30-27:37]
3. When posing questions to students in an online class, instructors should wait a few moments before providing the answer. This pause may be uncomfortable as an instructor but will allow students to collect their thoughts and build up the courage to respond—this also gives students time to overcome technical issues. [40:13-41:47]
4. It is important for instructors to hold office hours and provide students with additional support during these unprecedented times. [48:18-49:15]
5. It is important for instructors to be vulnerable and disseminate that this is an uncomfortable situation for everyone. Sharing experiences and difficulties with students may help build a deeper level connection with them. [50:24-51:43]

## Some key takeaways from each panelist Jodey Nurse, Assistant Professor, Wilson Institute for Canadian History

- Ask your students to submit a “stuff I should know about you” form. The form should contain general information about the student such as their preferred name, preferred pronoun, as well as broader questions such as concerns about upcoming assignments, issues with the course outline etc. This is an effective way to engage with your students and create a deeper level of understanding with them. [8:55-13:57]
- Create checklists for students on Avenue to Learn to help students stay focused and up to date with upcoming deadlines. [14:00-14:40]
- Provide feedback on participation and online discussions. Solely giving students a grade is not sufficient. This technique ensures that students know how to improve for next time. [15:25-16:00]

## Sandra VanderKaay, Post-doctoral fellow, CanChild in the School of Rehabilitation Science

- Schedule meetings every week where students have the option to attend and talk to their peers about class content or information related to the course. These meetings should be unstructured, and student driven. [19:36-23:00]
- If you run a small-sized class, try to learn your students’ names. Use their names to greet them at the beginning of the class or to ask questions during class. This provides students with comfort and additional encouragement to participate. [23:12-23:55]
- Try to merge your asynchronous and synchronous content to encourage students to attend live lectures. For example, allocate time during in-person lectures to address any questions and concerns about the asynchronous content. [24:00-24:50]
- Ensure students are engaged during asynchronous and synchronous lecture through incorporation of various surveys, chats, group work etc... [24:56-26:12]

## Nikol Piskuric, Assistant Professor, Department of psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour and School of Interdisciplinary Science

- Use your teaching assistants as facilitators to monitor questions in the teams’ chat. This will allow instructors to focus on their lecture and address questions without getting interrupted or distracted mid-presentation. [30:42-32:47]
- Try to incorporate interactive material such as polls and questions. Use the hand raising tool on teams to ask quick questions and ensure students are following along the material. [32:52-35:01]
- Stay back after lectures to give students the opportunity to ask questions. This is particularly beneficial for students who are shy or afraid to raise their concerns in a large cohort. [36:30-39:14]
- Create a mentorship program on teams for your program and invite students from different levels to participate and engage with their peers. This allows level 4 students to obtain leadership skills and level 1, 2 and 3 students to gather more information on their program. [39:20- 40:21]

## Mat Savelli, Undergraduate Chair and Assistant Professor, Department of Health, Aging and Society & Arts and Science Program

- Give students the option to attend asynchronous or synchronous tutorials. Students who decide to participate in asynchronous tutorials can be asked to complete an additional questionnaire every week. This reduces the burden of teaching assistants and allows students to have more control over their learning. [43:43-45:10]
- Encourage students to turn on their cameras during lecture. This is extremely beneficial for both parties, as it allows professors to feel more appreciated and forces students to stay focused. [45:12-47:20]
- Record weekly video announcements, to keep students informed about upcoming assignments, tests and important tasks. Seeing professors face may help students understand the gravity and seriousness of the tasks, as opposed to a simple written checklist. [49:19-50:05]

## Referenced Resources:

[Echo 360](#)

[Avenue to Learn](#)

