10 Strategies for Engaging Learners with Online Meetings

This document outlines 10 strategies for engaging learners with Online Meetings. This is not a how-to document; we simply describe some of the types of activities and strategies that may be useful in your course.

What are Online Meetings?

Online Meetings are web conferences that are hosted online with video, audio or both. Online meetings allow users to speak to multiple meeting participants, share visuals, and more.

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Strategy #1: Engage Learners through Dialogic Instruction
The basics: Online Meetings are designed to encourage dialogic instruction. Rather than interacting through message boards, participants can engage in real-time interaction and conversation. Consider putting yourself in the mix with your learners, dialoguing about the content of the course, asking questions, and engaging one another.

Variations on the approach: Employ a Student Response System to gauge learners' understanding of an important concept, or ask for opinions on a controversial issue, or to provide a back channel for discussion.

Student Response System Tools to use to employ this strategy:
- Poll Everywhere (recommended)
- Desire2Learn quizzing features (recommended)
- Top Hat

Strategy #2: Encourage Engagement and Interaction by Applying Ice-Breakers
The basics: California State University, Monterey Bay documentation on TelePresence in Education (see 'On the Web') suggests "to begin the class with some sort of activity or exercise that demonstrates the interactive nature of the technology. Students must learn as soon as possible that they are not watching television – they are engaged in a live interactive experience." Prepare an introductory ice-breaker that will help learners get to know each other and feel comfortable in the 'digital face-to-face' environment.

*Variations on the approach: Details on varying this approach can be found in the following documentation: Introductory Ice-Breakers (*Fay, Garrod, & Carletta, 2000)

Tools to power this strategy:

- MicroSoft Office 365
- PollEverywhere

Strategy #3: Use Tablets and Cloud-based Whiteboarding to Brainstorm Together
Online Meetings allow groups of people to co-create solutions to problems through brainstorming activities. You can integrate smart phones, tablet computers and cloud-based whiteboarding tools into the process to facilitate sharing ideas synchronously. One of the advantages of using the cloud based whiteboarding is that completed brainstorming documents will be available after class time.

Tools to power this strategy:
- Zoom

Strategy #4: Create a Hybrid Model Course
The basics: Synchronous Online Meetings offer a sense of being together with your students. It is designed to create experiences of being fully present in the same location even though participants are geographically separated. Webcam video in Online Meetings enables eye to eye contact, allowing participants to see facial expressions via high quality video and audio. You may blend your online course with Online Meeting's face-to-face interactions between you and your students thus you can maximize student engagement by employing strengths of both online learning and face-to-face learning.

Variations on the approach: Meet with your students in a Zoom Meeting to enhance asynchronous courses. A few suggestions; online office hours, assessment debriefing, project introductions, internship coordination.

Strategy #5: Transform Large Group Discussion into Smaller Breakout Discussions
The basics: Our Online Meeting software is designed in such a way that easily facilitates large group discussion amongst learners, but that isn't to suggest that smaller groups shouldn't be employed when appropriate. To offer guidance on this determination, consider that small group discussion is viewed as a bilateral process of establishing consensus among pairs of communicators, while large group discussion is viewed as a unilateral process of broadcasting information to the group at large (Fay, Garrod, & Carletta, 2000).

Let everyone learn from each other's views and experiences . One of the ways to get students to interact meaningfully is creating breakout sessions where a smaller group of students discuss specific aspects of the main meeting.

Tools to power this strategy:
- Zoom
- WebEx
- Skype

Variations on the approach: Instructors can create a discussion session in the Online Meeting software,

then students break into smaller groups. This will allow for more individual discussion and sharing, as well as provide an opportunity for students to work with different students than they usually do. Then come back and continue the discussion as a whole group in the main Online Meeting.

Strategy #6: Participate in Collaborative Virtual Meetings from Multiple Locations
The basics: Professional development and training opportunities are increasingly being offered via "webinar" or other models. By registering once and then connecting to multiple sites, you can not only connect the campus community to quality online training, but you can also create a discussion environment among your colleagues or students.

Variations on the approach: Instructors and students can join a webinar via various Online Meeting Software (e.g. a connect device in a classroom in Mankato or Edina, as well as from personal devices from home or at a distance). Students in both locations can watch the webinar and after the webinar students can discuss important issues that were mentioned during the webinar.

Strategy #7: Bring in Experts and Guest Speakers Who Can't Travel to Mankato
The basics: Bringing experts and guest speakers into the classroom can be costly, time consuming and sometimes not even possible. Introduce your students to different views and ideas by bringing the best speakers into your class.

Variations on the approach: Invite speakers for guest lectures, presentations, discussions or any other academic pursuits. Even if the speakers cannot make it to a physical location, they can connect in remotely.

Strategy #8: Bring Together Service Learning and Internship Students Working in the Twin Cities
The basics: Establish social contexts and effective connections between service learning and internship students by using Online Meeting software so that you can combine formal education with real world experiences to enhance learning. Students can discuss and convey their experiences. This can also provide meaningful opportunities for students to reflect on their service or internship experiences.

Variations on the approach: Set monthly meetings between your students in Mankato and internship students via Online Meeting. Let them discuss their learning experience during this in-class discussions. These meetings can also create opportunities for reflection and partnership among students.

Strategy #9: Engage Students by Employing a Socratic/Seminar Approach
The basics: The National Paideia Center (see, 'On the Web') defines Socratic Seminar as a 'Collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text (or, media, video, ect). The purpose of this type of approach is to achieve a deeper understanding about ideas and values in a text. Based on student handouts containing open ended questions, learners systematically question and examine issues and principles related to the particular pre-assigned content and articulate any differing viewpoints. Through analysis, interpretation, participation and listening, learns begin to construct meaning around the text.

Variations on the approach: For more a more detailed description of Socratic Seminar, including sample questions, assessment, and variations on the approach, please view this document provided by the National Paideia Center: [Socratic Seminar](#)

Strategy #10: Situated learning and coaching within a virtual classroom environment
The basics: TelePresence systems consist of sophisticated technologies to transmit high fidelity video and sound. In fact, one of the basic distinctions of TelePresence from video conference systems is that TelePresence offers high quality video and audio systems that simulate the effect of participants sitting in the same room. This feature offers much greater fidelity of vision and sound than traditional video conferencing systems. This feature also provides opportunities for offering authentic contexts and activities remotely. TelePresence rooms can be used to create authentic learning environments allowing instructors and students to visualize, to model, to reflect and to coach.

Variations on the approach: You or an expert show and explain a topic, let students watch, observe, and reflect on how to apply what they just observed and provide authentic feedback remotely using TelePresence. For instance, assume you are teaching a music class and want to teach how to play violin. You may have trouble finding a master musician to play a violin in Mankato. However, you may be able to connect your students in Mankato with a violin master in Minneapolis via TelePresence. The master can not only provide advice and feedback on how to play but also coach your students remotely to play themselves.

If TelePresence is not available, use one of the following software:
- Zoom
- Zoom
- WebEx
- Skype

References

Conrad, R., & Donaldson, J. A. (2011). *Engaging the online learner: Activities and resources for creative instruction*. (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fay, N., Garrod, S., & Carletta, J. (2000). Group Discussion as Interactive Dialogue or as Serial Monologue: The Influence of Group Size. *Psychological Science (Wiley-Blackwell)*, *11*(6),

Russell, D. (2009). *Cases on Collaboration in Virtual Learning Environments*. IGI Global Publishing, Hershey, PA.

On The Web

California State University - Monterey Bay:
- [TelePresence in Education](#)

National Paideia Center:
- [www.nwabr.org](#)

- [Socratic Seminar](#)

Group Discussion as Interactive Dialogue or Serial Monologue:

- http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11202493