Facilitating Remote Discussions

a guide for transitioning from in-person to remote class discussions

1. Return to Your Place of Learning

Whether it is a classroom, the seminar table, a laboratory, the stage, or a workplace -- each physical space conveys how we relate and communicate with each other.

Your challenge:

Reconstruct the contours of the place to better understand why and how learning occurs.

Dr. Roger L. Martínez-Dávila
Department of History
Univ. of Colorado-Colorado Springs
rmartin8@uccs.edu
www.rogerlouismartinez.com

Assess the Contours of Space

Assessing questions

- How do furniture and seating facilitate interaction between participants?
- What special tools and materials do you and your students use?
- What role do light and sound play in shaping relationships?

example:

Participants gather around a large table. Students have direct/indirect views of each other. Professor has direct eye contact and listening access.
- Spacing of chairs allow participants to lean in or withdraw from discussion.
- The book is the center of our attention and supplemented with a AV display.
- Images of manuscripts, places, and objects offer elaboration.
- Music and film samples offer interpretations of history.
- Large windows bring in natural light and a mountain view.

Imagery from
The Nuremberg Chronicle (1493)
Bavarian State Library, Germany
https://www.wdl.org/en/item/4108/
2. CHARACTERIZE WHAT HAPPENS

Assessing questions

- Who initiates and closes conversation? How is this signaled?
- What is discussed and how do the participants know it is relevant and of value?
- How are participants provoked or welcomed to speak?
- What verbal cues and body motion techniques promote common understandings?
- Why do certain issues propel discussions? What kills conversation?
- What is the place of intellectual conflict in discussion?

Example: Historians around the seminar table

- Professor signals the opening of discussion with a framing lecture, dialectic process, or open-ended questions and comments.
- Student signals the beginning of discussion with an inquiry, a request for clarification, or a desire to share knowledge.
- The profession dictates what is of value in terms of secondary and primary sources. Discussions of secondary texts focus on historiography, argumentation, organization, theoretical approaches, research methods, use of evidence, and biases. Primary sources dictate close reading for evidence that reveals values, beliefs, norms, concerns, and prevalence of phenomenon.
- Participants are drawn into discussion using a prompt, strawman, assigned roles, round-robin questioning, responses to pre-distributed questions. Participants can be encouraged using knowledge about a particular student’s interest.
- Eye contact, head nodding, repetitive verbal confirmation (“yes, yes.”), and open hand gestures welcome more thought and a validation of prominent and important ideas.
- Controversial, unpopular, atypical, novel, and tangential ideas can both advance and block discussion. Create a space for balanced discussion by inviting exploration and opportunities for discovery.
- Conflict, disagreement, and contrarian views are a centerpiece of intellectual debate. Establishing norms for fair, equitable, and respectful speech are essential.
3. IMAGINE "RUPP EMULATIONS"

"Rupp Emulations" replicate parts of the original item. Because we cannot holistically regenerate the entire item in the digital world, we must breakdown the item into its essential elements. Next, we can create certain "aspects" of the original item's nature as "Rupp Emulations".

Your challenge:

Envision how participants in digital worlds and online discussions can:

- Replicate the natural flow of in-person discussions,
- Communicate using verbal and non-verbal cues, and
- "Occupy" a digital space as a community of scholars and colleagues.

Imagining digital replicas of the real world

- How can the physical and spatial relationships of discussion be regenerated digitally?
- How can non-verbal feedback and encouragement be communicated with digital means?
- How can digital objects serve as abstract forms of real world items?
- How can typical ebbs and flows of in-person communication self-generate in the digital world?
- How can contrarian and unpopular views be supported via digital communication?

Examples from Real World Discussions

- Professor signals the opening of discussion with a framing lecture, dialectic process, or open-ended questions and comments.
- The book is the center of our attention and supplemented with a AV display.
- Eye contact, head nodding, repetitive verbal confirmation ("yes, yes."), and open hand gestures welcome more thought and a validation of prominent and important ideas.
- Controversial, unpopular, atypical, novel, and tangential ideas can both advance and block discussions.

Digital World Rupp Emulations

- Professor posts questions or mini 5-minute video statement to Canvas® discussion board.
- Students pre-post video questions to discussion board.
- Professor uses screen share of slides during video conferencing (Microsoft Teams®, WebEx®, Zoom®, Skype®)
- Students use public and private text chat with professor during video conferencing to interject/ask question.
- Use of Emoticons in public text chat to promote and acknowledge 👍 (+ ideas), 😞 (confusion), 🌟 (consensus), 🔨 (recognize good tools), 💡 (new bright idea)

Example: historians around the seminar table

A thank you to Ms. Mary Rupp, Archivist at the UCCS Archives, for provoking the thought of how to preserve virtual world experiences using "emulations". Prof. Martinez coined the phrase "Rupp Emulations" to acknowledge and preserve her contributions to these ideas.
1. RETURN TO YOUR PLACE OF LEARNING

Reconstruct the contours of the place to better understand why and how learning occurs.

2. CHARACTERIZE WHAT HAPPENS

Float like an angelic observer over your past experiences with exceptionally rich discussions. Describe what you see.

3. IMAGINE "RUPP EMULATIONS"

Imagine how real world spaces and discussions are manifested in the digital world.