

How To Humanize Your Online Course

Collaborative Guide created August 30, 2023 by
participants in the *How to Humanize Your Online Course* workshop

<https://teachingandlearning.knowledgeowl.com/docs/schedule>

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Discussion about video clip from “I Am Mother”:

What might the child be lacking?

- Attention, care, love
- Physical touch
- Growth experience incomplete from no yelling / discipline from mother
- Social interaction
- Learning body language / social cues
- Kids and students want to be seen by others in order to engage and learn

“On a more positive note, the child in the video will also avoid potentially harmful situations, e.g. neglect or abuse”

Social Needs

Building Community

1. What are some strategies or activities you can use to build community during class?

Breakout rooms for small group work to engage with concepts/ case studies real time — many students like that sense of community, some students hate breakout groups

As a full-time remote worker, the most helpful strategy has been creating a culture of reliability and accountability. For example, being present and engaged in the mediums of communication we use, or delivering work products in an agreed upon timeline.

Creating a space where people are open to express their personalities. No one likes to be treated as an automaton, so sometimes, it's better to sacrifice efficiency to encourage diversity of opinion.

Initial check-ins at the beginning of each class.

Encourage participation verbally or thru chat function, recognizing that different people are comfortable using different modes to contribute their ideas

In our summer course, we created a google document that included: their portrait and their bio

Icebreakers | Get students in groups get them to find one thing their group have in common | Ex they all play an instrument, they speak different languages.

Put students in groups to solve a problem (synchronous)

Build meaningful representation into presentations to allow students to see people such as themselves in the field. Guest speakers can also help accomplish this.

Breakout sessions during regularly scheduled breaks purely for socializing and catching up.

Encourage students to respond to a prompt or discussion point with stories from their personal experience/narrative.

Ask students about themselves in small groups

Have students pair up, interview each other on some specific questions relevant to the topic,, and then introduce each other to the class

Beginning of class, introductions and icebreakers

Students pair up and introduce themselves to each other, then one partner introduces the other to the class

Outside of class: challenging especially classes with more than 20 students

Empathy mapping - create a picture of a person, draw thought bubbles - what are they thinking? What are they feeling? Online tool to draw this and people can add notes via 'post-it notes'. Both synchronous and asynchronous students could add to the picture.

2. What are some strategies or activities you can use to build community outside of class?

Create dialogue through Canvas — discussion of relevant news pieces, conversations about case studies (graded for low contribution to total semester grade, just to make sure people participate – but at best helps build community)

Assign group discussions

Last semester, one of my students set up WhatsApp and students used it to talk throughout the semester about assignments and perceptions

ASK questions at class of those in class and online then via YELLOW dig; I ask about environmental issues where students live

Resource: <https://teachingandlearning.knowledgeowl.com/docs/gather-study-lounge>

Breakout rooms for class discussion and synchronous students discuss in class, then everyone comes together to have a big group discussion

Honor all responses to answers even if incorrect

Inclusion: Psychological Safety

How can we foster a psychologically safe environment in an online/hybrid course?

2 minute video that offers warmth and inclusion

Have some time assigned for “no stupid ideas”. As the instructor or TA, come prepared with some of your own to set the tone.

Maintain a culture of criticizing ideas, not people.

Offer some vulnerability to open that door.

Maintain and expect an attitude of respect: allow space for people to think out loud, to offer contrary views, to wrestle with challenging concepts with an attitude of coaching and not putting people down for being wrong [which is not, by the way, how my university taught!]

Avoid timed assignments unless necessary for the subject matter

“Learning feels like failing”

Have the students take turn being the moderator, with the assignment to ensure that everyone is heard and respected. (works in smaller groups)

Repeat back questions to the student asking / the class to make sure you understand and also increase class engagement

At the beginning of class, a powerful activity: on campus students to online students and vice versa, stand up and say “We hear you, we see you”

Lead by example. If you want students to share mistakes, share your own and how you learned from them.

Getting students’ identities correct (example: name pronunciation); on discussion board – ask students to tell everyone how to pronounce names, make aware of and use correct pronouns

Promote growth mindset, taking risks, building resilience

Applicability: Significant Learning

- **What opportunities for significant learning do you provide for your students? If you haven't done this yet, what would you plan to do?**

Ask students to say who they are, where they are from, and what their environmental interests are.

Show some real life examples of work products that draw a direct line to their assignments.

Encourage them to reach out to mentors or peers to help put their work in deeper context [hint: you should set assignments where there will be a context to find]

Tie in-class exercises and assignments to real-world issues, some keyed into the question i ask of students in the first class about what topics they want to explore

Talking about real world applications from your own daily experiences

Students might be from different time zones, so spreading out office hours and one on one appointments to make it more convenient for all students to ask questions and bring a more human touch to the class