Zoom into Your Online Course with Mindful and Effective Techniques

Tierney King, Megwen Loveless, Oliver Dreon

Tierney King 00:01
This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. As we enter the new year, your list of goals and intentions for the year may be a well-crafted and well-thought-out plan. And perhaps on that list of yours are ways to be more mindful and effective when teaching online, specifically, if you're using Zoom or other alternatives. If that's the case, stay tuned, because this episode will cover mindful techniques that you can implement into your online classroom. And we'll even dive into specific Zoom features that can help increase student interactivity. To start, Oliver Dreon provides tactics that you can use to be mindful, intentional, and present in your online classroom in his Magna Online Seminar, Implementing Mindful Online Teaching Using Zoom.

Oliver Dreon 01:02
One of the things that I've seen on campus, and I'm sure if you've been working on college campuses you've seen some of this, too, is that there's a huge mental health crisis on our campuses. This was present before the pandemic, and it's certainly going to be around after as well. And so some of the data I'm sharing here is from the Jed Foundation. And the Jed Foundation did a survey in 2020, where they interviewed 200 college students, and what they found was that there's some serious mental health issues that are happening in terms of anxiety and stress, loneliness, depression, having trouble sleeping, and having trouble concentrating. And these are things that are happening across campuses, not just because of the pandemic, or it was happening before the pandemic, but students are feeling isolated, they're feeling lonely. And the concerns are that as they're taking more and more online classes, they are feeling more and more isolated from classmates. When I see these numbers and see these statistics, one of the things I always think about is what I can do as a classroom teacher, to help support students and help them feel more attached to their classmates more connected to the professor's. One of the things that came to me as I was thinking about how I could support my students, both in online classes and then face-to-face classes, was how I can support their their mental health and well-being? I started to think about mindfulness. And, and I know that this mindfulness concept, you know, you come across it in a lot of self-help places and it seems like a very touchy-feely type of thing. And it's like, well, how does that apply to our our collegiate classrooms? And I think, I

don't want to take us down the route of, you know, like Zen/Buddhism or anything like that here. I just, I guess the definition from mindfulness that I want to apply for us today is this is just being aware. It's being aware of the particular qualities, being intentional, being present, being friendly, being open, caring, curious and aware. So that's really the focus that I want to take today is how can we be mindful? How can we be present and aware in the things that we can do in our synchronous spaces to help foster a sense of belonging and a sense of community in our synchronous classrooms?

Tierney King 03:22
In the following, Dreon offers techniques to help foster a sense of community in your online space, from making time to vacation backgrounds, he explains that it's the little things that can help engage students and make them excited to attend class.

Oliver Dreon 03:37
The first one is make time. And and for me, this is one of the things that I, as a classroom teacher, I always came to class early if it was a face-to-face classroom, and I'd stick around after where students would stick around and ask questions. And then some of the students would come before class and ask questions. I find that with Zoom, and with our synchronous basis, we do this a lot less. What we do is that the class starts at nine, we'll open up at nine. And what I decided to do early on is start telling students, "I'm going to open up the class like 15 minutes early." And then what I found was that students started coming earlier. And I'd actually open the room early and just like play some music from my Spotify account or something, just something that just like kinda, you know, filled the space with some ambience, and I found that students would come just to kind of hang out and ask questions. And then at the end, you know, I found that if I kept the room open for a few minutes, some of the students would stick around after class to ask questions to say, "Hey, you know, I had a question about this assignment." "I had a question about this." And those types of things are things that we tend, you know, not to really think about with Zoom. What we do with Zoom is we start it and stop it on the hour that has been scheduled. And I think what that does is that, you know, it doesn't leave the opportunities for those sort of like just-in-time conversations that tend to happen in our face-to-face classrooms, those things where somebody comes in and you see their backpack or you see that they have a, you know, button or a rock band t-shirt or something. And it fosters all sorts of impromptu conversations that built those connections. What I tried to do is just create these sort of events. I had a hat day. I had a school spirit day where you wear a school spirit sweatshirt or school spirit hat to represent the university. I had a day where people introduce their pets. Again, these are just like little things at the beginning of class. I had all the people to just take a second to introduce your pet. Vacation background day, this is a really popular one. I just had the students, because, you know, we all have these, you know, in Zoom, we can all do backgrounds. And so I asked the students, okay, if you could pick, you know, and this was great, like, as we were in the throes of winter, right? I said, Okay, it's cold, it's kind of depressing and dark out there. Where is it you'd like to go? And you know, get that picture, it could be, you know, real, or it could be fictional. And so I had students that were like, you know, putting up pictures of like, places like Star Wars and people from places from comic books and things. So it was really cool to see what their interests were and what things that they'd like to visit. And these are, again, things that may seem like a distraction in the class, but they're actually not because they could just take a second or two at the beginning. The students feel like they anticipate coming to class, because I've done something to break up, sort of like the monotony of attending Zoom. You login to zoom, you know, go through slides, and

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then they leave. And what I've tried to do is to, you know, I would do these things in my face-to-face class, and what can I do in my online spaces? Well, one of the goals for me and my classes is I try to hear from every student every day. So that doesn't necessarily mean that I hear their voice, but I want them to participate every time, every class. And so this requires some real intentionality on my part. So this is, and I've tried to use a bunch of different techniques to talk about this. And the first one is, is we'll have names, this is a website and but we'll have names is almost like a a wheel of fortune site. And what you do is you can just take and put the students names in this little like sidebar, and it creates a wheel with all the students names in it. And I project that in there. And I'll throw out a question. And then I'll hit the wheel of names that kind of goes around randomly, until eventually it stops on a student. And so as everyone is looking at the wheel of names, they're anticipating that someone is going to be selected. What that does is then after I hit the hit the selection, that person's name is pulled off of the wheel and the wheel can continue. And so, you know, for bigger classes that might be hard to get everyone involved that way, but what I do is it sort of randomizes the process a little bit so that it is selecting someone that I'm going to call on and it's sort of like a fun way of getting the students engaged and they know that everyone's going to get you know, or almost everyone is going to get selected at some place. Again, this is my way of getting students to be engaged in the class to hear from every student every time.

Tierney King 08:17
There are also numerous features on Zoom that are built in to help increase student engagement. In Megwen Loveless's Magna Online Seminar, An Online Educator's Guide to Using Zoom Features to Enhance Student Interactivity, she explains how you can go from being simply lecture-based to an interactive lecture via Zoom. From polling to video viewing, Loveless explains how to integrate Zoom features to help enhance student interactivity in your own online class.

Megwen Loveless 08:48
Why and when should I use polling? When can it be useful? This is just a little bit of a brainstorm of mine. This is what I have used polling for. It can be great to figure out what background knowledge your students have when they're coming into class. So let's say you plan to have a flipped classroom, and you plan for them to prepare certain things. You want to make sure that they're actually ready to use that knowledge when you get to the classroom. So you give them a little pretest to make sure that everyone is on the same page. You can get a sense of who has come prepared, right? There's a way that you can record the polling statistics. If you're interested you can have access to them during class, but you can also have access to that later. Another interesting thing to do is to have students take a poll as they come into class. And then after you've worked on the material for your class period for however long, quiz them again and just see how the overall scores have improved, right? Particularly as they're seeing their scores improve. It's going to give them a sense of accomplishment and a real positive sense of your class having been fruitful; having been really useful. Polls are also a great way to get some conversations going before you take them out into breakout rooms. Maybe for the poll that we just had up about burgers or spaghetti, maybe I want them to practice having a debate, and one has to be pro burger and one has to be pro spaghetti. And they have to really get into it and talk about the pros and cons of both, right, so I can do the poll first, then send them to their breakout rooms. And they sort of have that poll in their heads as something that they can then elaborate on. So you can set up any number of polls. And each of those polls can have any number of questions. And you can then

launch them in sequential order in whichever order you want. Zoom should walk you through that, right? So when you say you want to do a poll, it'll bring up a window and you'll be able to check which of those polls you want to do. And it will then broadcast all of the questions from that particular poll, right? One of the cool thing about polls is you can actually rebroadcast the same poll later in class.

Tierney King 11:07
In addition to polling, Loveless explains how she uses video viewing and the annotate function to do a number of things to help get students moving and engaged during her lectures.

Megwen Loveless 11:18
All right, let's go back to share screen. This is what it looks like when you press that button. And I've put a red arrow here just to remind you that you always, always, always want to tell it to to share computer sound. If you plan on watching any videos or listening to any sound, that means that they're hearing the audio as it comes through your computer, not as it would come through your computer's microphones. There's also a button here to optimize for video viewing. I actually prefer to watch videos at the same time through Zoom with my students. Other people have some trouble just because of internet connectivity. You could do it both ways, right, you could send hyperlinks through the chat, and so students who are having any trouble can access that on their own, and or they could watch with the rest of the class. So you could do that either way. So when you share the screen, you're going to have this option to annotate, right? You have an option to do text, to draw, to stamp. This annotate function is one of the number one ways that I get students engaged. Like I said, I really want to see their fingers moving, I want to see them participating using their fingertips. So I'm getting them to write in the chat. I'm getting them to give me some thumbs up or clap. And then what I'm getting them to do is to annotate on top of the screen that I'm sharing. So this is what it would look like for the student view. For the student view, they have a green bar at the top of their screen, which says you are viewing someone's screen. And next to that is an Options bar. And they can come down here to where it says annotate. What I have students do on the annotate functions is, gosh, it's, you can do any number of things. One of my favorite is just to leave the whiteboard open, and have students brainstorm on that whiteboard right now. I'm talking to a bunch of different groups of incoming freshmen who are starting their orientation, and have tons of questions about their classes and about New Orleans and about Tulane and about campus. And what I have them do because they're all very nervous, and none of them necessarily want to talk out loud, I have them do anonymous brainstorming on the whiteboard. This is something that you could also do through a site like Padlet. But my preference is to keep it basic, to keep it simple. And one of the reasons that the whiteboard is fun, is because the students can change the color the students can change the size, some of the students end up drawing, instead of just using text. And it's it's a fun way of getting them to be a little more playful.

Tierney King 13:58
Overall, whether you're using Zoom or any other platform for your online classes, Loveless expresses the importance of incorporating movement so students learn with both their minds and bodies.

Megwen Loveless 14:10
My experience with Zoom was actually quite limited before we went online last semester, and everything that I'm presenting to you I've gotten either through training sessions that I've been to, or just

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trial and error about what has worked in my classroom. One of the things that really stands out about my teaching is this emphasis on kinesthetic learning. So I think it's very important that students learn not just with their minds, but also with their bodies. That really helps to underscore what they're learning - is to have them moving around and using their bodies in order to get all the different points across.

Tierney King 14:50
Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 15-minute think session, we hope the Faculty Focus Live podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode description.