

## Experiencing the Online Classroom, Part 2

*The Online Classroom is a production from the Instructional Design and Development team at the University of Northern Colorado. This podcast was hosted and edited by Dannon Cox.*

Anabell Chavez

Going into a position where I am working remote at times, I don't think I would have been able to do it if I didn't have that experience, doing remote classwork, and just getting comfortable with an online format has been a really big adjustment. And so yeah, I would say that that has definitely translated into a lot of different aspects, whether that's just you know, doing paperwork online, which you would normally be able to do in person or doing online DMV appointments, which is a crazy concept. But yeah, it kind of translates into everything that we're experiencing now, which is huge.

Dannon Cox

Hello, and welcome to The Online Classroom. A podcast mini-series from UNC's Instructional Design and Development team. Chapter Three, Experiencing The Online Classroom, part two. In part one of Experiencing The Online Classroom, Ana and Catherine reflected on their time being a student at UNC while adapting to Canvas.

Catherine Maher

I know my freshman year, it was kind of hard, like when you're new to it. But over like the past two years, I haven't really had any problems. And I might be lucky because all my professors knew how to use it. And they would like post assignments way ahead of time. That's like a key thing, like making sure the assignments are posted at a reasonable time. So if you want to get them done early, you can.

Dannon Cox

In this final installment of the online classroom, we leave you with advice, cautionary tales, and the overall importance of teaching and learning in an online environment. Here's Heidi and two of her former students, Ana and Catherine.

Dr. Heidi Muller

So other than the timing issue seems to be really important - get your stuff up there early and on time. Are there any other things that you've kind of noticed that like, wow, this makes my life better or worse from what teachers do online?

Catherine Maher

I personally have a problem with discussion boards.

Dr. Heidi Muller

That's what we're here for (laughter)

Dannon Cox

(laughter) Go on ...

Dr. Heidi Muller

We're here to hear. You betcha.

Catherine Maher

They're so annoying. Because everybody's just, you know, answering their questions for a discussion board or like whatever you're discussing. And then it's always like reply to two to four people before this date. And literally every reply to each person's post is the exact same. It's like, wow, I really agree with that. Thank you so much for posting, like copy and paste.

Dannon Cox

Like, if they allow it. Yeah,

Catherine Maher

Yeah. And I don't know, like, I get it. Why you some sometimes, like for one of my online classes, we used it heavily for that. Yeah. So I can like kind of get that. It's just they annoy me.

Dr. Heidi Muller

The whole, the whole have this many replies by a certain date doesn't seem to really function well.

Catherine Maher

Yeah. I mean, I get it that they want you to like discuss, but ...

Dannon Cox

It's also like a two part, right? Because you have to first post, and then if you do that too late, and then you have to reply, and then some people haven't posted yet. So then you got to wait. So there's this like odd timing. And it's usually like within a week, so it's never fully a smooth ride. I feel like the discussion now. Yeah. And then you're right. Like, you're just, there's this for me, I've had that for like, Yes, I guess I'll just oh, this sounds wonderful. Extra exclamation point. So I can show it, or GIF. That's what I'll send. Is it good? Yeah. Ana, do you have anything?

Anabell Chavez

Kind of going off with the discussion board comment, I do find those a little frustrating as well. And that's just because of the magnitude of them that you do get when you're in an online format. There have definitely been a few times where I've had like four or five discussion boards each from a different class, and you're just like, okay, well, I guess I'll choose the same standard reply and go through all of them at once. And so I don't know, I feel like it's just really hard to kind of mimic a discussion, virtually, at least in a written format, because you're not going to get that natural flow of conversation. And it's really hard to just kind of take what they're saying and really come up with something that would be a really good reply when you're just kind of typing it out. And you know, it's kind of expected, it's not the same as the discussion in class.

Dannon Cox

So maybe we should make students argue and say, I don't agree with you, and then that way it can start to have

Anabell Chavez

I think that would actually hold the conversation a little bit

Dannon Cox

It would hold it a little bit stronger. I'm not saying that's the answer

Dr. Heidi Muller

Oh, no, no, no. And I think that's the whole point. If you can structure, sometimes you can structure a discussion and have certain kinds of prompts or other kinds of things. How do you do the discussions, do the professor's usually contribute to those discussions, or are they just students?

Anabell Chavez

It's usually primarily just students

Catherine Maher

I had one professor who would like comment here and there on replies.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Did you feel like that helped or didn't help or didn't really matter?

Catherine Maher

I think it helped a tiny bit because people will get like feedback instantly. And I was like, oh, okay, so this is what we're supposed to be doing.

Dr. Heidi Muller

That question of feedback that you just raised, do you feel like, there are ways you get feedback, what are the ways you get feedback on how you're doing in an online class? Or what you need to do or change? Or if you're doing great? Or is it just the grades? Or is it - what else?

Catherine Maher

Um, I, like, the same professor would, like, write you real feedback on your like, it's like that submission feedback thing, would like write you a paragraph and be like, I really liked this, or you should add more of this next time. Like actual feedback ...

Dr. Heidi Muller

In the actual like, comment section on the assignment. Yeah.

Dannon Cox

So not public, but only to you.

Catherine Maher

Yes.

Dannon Cox

Okay. Got it.

Catherine Maher

Yes, but most professors online no. I just want my grades.

Dr. Heidi Muller

But that that comment box, the individual comment box, seemed like it ... you attended to that as a student, you paid attention to that?

Catherine Maher

Yes. I always do.

Anabell Chavez

For me, one of my, not favorite, but one of the professors that I've really worked with very closely for years now, he would really take the time to like, go through any assignment, any paper that I was doing, and critically point out anything that he thought I needed work on, while also doing the same for anything that he thought I did really well, which I found really beneficial, because I felt like that really improved my writing and how I was picking up stances and making arguments and that kind of thing and my papers. And then Dr. Lin Ellen I, at first I was a little taken aback. I wasn't expecting it, but she actually gives personalized audios. Yeah, exactly of her talking, explaining criticisms and compliments on your work, which I personally really liked. I thought that was really one unique and kind of caught my attention and also gave me expectations and you know, an idea of what I should strive for in future assignments, especially with her.

Dr. Heidi Muller

And those were, again, just specific assignments just to you.

Anabell Chavez

Yeah.

Dannon Cox

And then on the on the discussion, because like, sounds like you've had discussions ad nauseam, do you have any suggestions then for faculty? Like what would be like a piece of advice or something?

Anabell Chavez

I would say that you know, being involved in it makes it feel a lot more like an actual classroom discussion. When you're in an actual classroom, your professors are going to jump in and say, oh, okay, great point. But what do you think about this and kind of move it forward. And so I would say, you know, be involved in it as much as you can, and as much as you deem necessary. But I would also say, just creating discussion boards, make them I don't know, structured, unique and make them interesting on topics that you can actually discuss and not just a reflect on this, or tell me what you think on this or explain this. And, like analyze it just pose a question that's going to actually cause a discussion, not just a reflection on what we're talking about, or what we're learning in that moment.

Dr. Heidi Muller

I don't know if you remember in the 102 class, I have those "This or That" discussions where you have to say, "Do you like verbal or nonverbal better?"

Catherine Maher

Oh, yeah.

Dr. Heidi Muller

I mean, is that that's kind of an argument, but not exactly an argument. Is that is that a helpful way to do it to give you like a side to take or anything like that? If you remember,

Catherine Maher

I would say so. Because, you know, you see that you choose a side and then you can be like, "This is why."

Dr. Heidi Muller

Yeah,

Catherine Maher

Like, you have something to grasp and write your answer about. And it's not like super like textbook, like there's more flexibility with it.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Do you feel like in discussions people are, it seems like people are expecting you to reiterate the textbook sometimes?

Catherine Maher

Yes.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Oh, that's what it feels like?

Catherine Maher

Not for that question

Dr. Heidi Muller

Yeah. Not for the This or That question that was really what do you think and why is it important? So that we're moving on from my class, to discussions in general, you just mentioned that you don't have to reiterate the text, but does it feel like that's what you're being asked to do in the discussions?

Catherine Maher

Yes.

Dr. Heidi Muller

That's hard to discuss when you're just reiterating the textbook.

Catherine Maher

Yes. (cross talk and laughter)

Dannon Cox

We've had a lot of discussions about that in the past to of just like, how faculty can be bound to the textbook, and then and then to stray away from it. And as someone who's who's teaching who's more than neophyte side, I've learned like, I don't know, I've never created this content, but this book has it clearly laid out. So then I almost rely on that. But then that also, it's like a shackle, because then I'm stuck with that, because then I just get used to that and then I become complacent, and I don't want to do that. And it's hard to pull away for some I can see.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Yeah, and I think to me, that's I mean, I one of the things I researched this discussion, and I know that if you if you're fishing, what we call fishing for answers, it doesn't work.

Dannon Cox

Yeah, right.

Dr. Heidi Muller

It really doesn't work because everyone ... either you feel that or you know, you're gonna get it wrong or it's like, whatever. I put something up there because it's whatever.

Dannon Cox

Yeah.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Catherine right now.

Dannon Cox

Yeah. Copy Paste. Yeah. So ...

Dr. Heidi Muller

That's interesting. You have to actually write a discussion question that you would use to maybe make people think that or that they would sort of generate different perspectives or answers in the in the question itself. But yeah, so that idea of use if it's literally a forum where that's where you're sharing your voice with other people, then that's, I think that's what you're looking for in a discussion is a forum to share your voice. And if the questions are worded in a way that you're not doing that it doesn't feel like a discussion.

I mean, what are some of the things that you felt have helped you learn online, other than timing? Is there anything else? Or does it just feel like, if you know how to do it, you know how to do it?

Anabell Chavez

I would save the flexibility, not only in, you know, when we get our assignments in, but how we do them? What environment we're going to do them in and that kind of thing?

Dannon Cox

Do you have an example of something like that?

Anabell Chavez

Yeah

Dannon Cox

Sorry to interrupt.

Anabell Chavez

No, you're okay.

Dannon Cox

I'm so curious.

Anabell Chavez

I like the flexibility of online classes, if I kind of going back to what I was saying, if I feel burnt out on one subject, or you know, project or assignment or something like that, I can take a breather and still be productive in something else and feel completely fine. A lot of my schedule is usually either political science or communication. And so going back and forth between the two subjects has been really helpful and making sure that I'm giving my best work, while staying focused, and, you know, just giving myself a little bit of a minute and not really burn out on one subject or the other. So yeah, there were a lot of times where I would say, okay, well, I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do it until here, and then I'm going to go fill up my water bottle, and I'll come back and I'll do something else. And it really just keeps you going and really just makes sure that you're staying on top of things, at least that's what it did for me. And you can't really do that if you're sitting in an hour long and an hour, 15 minute long lecture and you're like, oh

my gosh, I can't listen to this anymore. (inaudible) I'll just sit in a different class for a couple of minutes. I can't do this anymore.

Dannon Cox

My water bottle is already full. I can't refill it and come back.

Dr. Heidi Muller

I'm watching fourteen people leave out the door.

Catherine Maher

I would have to agree with that, like the flexibility for it. Especially if you're like busy. So one day, I can sit down and do a bunch of assignments and readings or whatever I have for that class. And then get that all done in that day or two. And then I can work or hang out with friends or whatever I have to do. And I'm not stressing about like classes, because I already got the work done.

Dannon Cox

What I'm hearing from that is making sure that those assignments are posted.

Catherine Maher

Yes, exactly. Exactly. Yeah.

Dannon Cox

And that there public.

Catherine Maher

Everything goes back to that.

Dannon Cox

Yeah, I'm guilty. I've done it plenty of times where, I'm like I published it and they're like, kinda because there's the publisher the module and there's the published for the assignment.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Layers of publishing ...

Dannon Cox

Yeah, yeah, we always forget it too, especially when you copy paste things and it doesn't do it ...

Dr. Heidi Muller

Did either of you do any synchronous classes online?

Anabell Chavez

No.



Catherine Maher  
I did a few, yeah ...

Dr. Heidi Muller  
I have my I have my thumbs down, and she said yes to that.

Dannon Cox  
Is it just the whole sitting down and being stared at on a Zoom screen?

Catherine Maher  
I can't focus ...

Anabell Chavez  
No, I did it for like one class

Catherine Maher  
It's terrible!

Anabell Chavez  
And I had to take a different one because I couldn't do it. I, especially sitting down, I have a hard time doing that in classes in person. But if I'm sitting down for too long, I get antsy and I need to move, and so when I was on Zoom or something like that, I kind of just get up and move if I was in the middle of like, ...

Dr. Heidi Muller  
Right, I get you ... (inaudible cross talk)

Anabell Chavez  
I would get up and go do chores during class. I would stop paying attention. I was like washing the dishes hoping that nobody said anything or I needed to talk.

Dannon Cox  
I mean you turn off a camera right? So, no one knows.

Catherine Maher  
I'm on mute, my camera's off. Sometimes I'm on my phone. Sometimes I'm doing chores. I multi-task.

Dr. Heidi Muller  
You definitely need to do a five minute warning - everybody back - you're gonna have to turn your cameras on - five-minute warning

Dannon Cox

Oh, it's so true ...

Catherine Maher

I cannot focus with those. It's impossible.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Okay, I guess the other question I kind of had was like I sometimes try to have group assignments when you're online. What is your experience with those?

Anabell Chavez

Going back to one of the classes that I took with you, I personally had a little bit of a hard time with that - just because it's a lot more difficult to you know, hold yourself - not even yourself, but like your group members as well - accountable for the portions that they're doing online because they're also dealing with all of the struggles of being at home and, you know, juggling other classes online. And it's an adjustment and a learning process for everybody. But it's just a lot more difficult to stay accountable to your group and hold them accountable for their work. And remaining in contact with them is also such a struggle, because you've never had that face-to-face interaction, or really gotten to know them. And so it's kind of weird to just like, have a text message group chat, talking about an assignment with a bunch of people that you've, you don't even know what they look like, or what they sound like.

Dannon Cox

And did you have anything, Catherine?

Catherine Maher

It's definitely the contact and group members. Because sometimes people will just not respond forever. And it's like, well, I'm not going to see them ever. So I can't like confront them about it. You can only go tell the professor and be like, hey, I tried contacting so and so and they never responded?

Do you feel like you are in touch with your peers at all? I mean, do you feel like you get to know your peers at all in online class? Does it matter who else is in the class? Or does it really feel like you're just doing your own thing?

Anabell Chavez

Personally, it doesn't really matter to me who else does in the class, because it's not like I'm gonna have a lot of interaction with them to begin with. And honestly, like for your class, right now that I'm currently in, I'm lucky that I was able to actually meet my group before this whole thing happened. And then now I'm like, doing all of your classes on Zoom. But even now, like after I worked with them for six to seven weeks beforehand, in person and transferred on to just watching the class on Zoom, it's still difficult to remain in contact with them, because I'm not seeing them constantly. And so trying to transfer that over to online is even more difficult. And so if I'm not going to see them daily, or every other day, or at least a couple of times a week, I'm not really worried about who they are, like why they're in the class.

Dr. Heidi Muller

That's interesting to me, because sometimes I think you guys can help each other out, remind each other of things and all that kind of stuff. But in online classes, it's just really not the case?

Catherine Maher

No. Yeah, I could care less who's in my online class. I just don't care.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Yeah, I mean, I think there are ways I think you can maybe do some some small group things, but you've got to really structure it tightly, would be my guess?

Dannon Cox

Yeah

Dr. Heidi Muller

Make it make it sense that you're what you're doing, how it fits, is almost like a cooperative learning approach, where everybody has their own task that they're assigned. And doing that kind of thing would probably work.

Anabell Chavez

I would say that it's kind of, I guess, a really important discussion to be having right now. Because it seems like a lot of our modern world is moving towards a virtual world and a lot of different aspects, whether that's just work or appointments, or I've even seen people doing therapy online, and that kind of thing. So it's, it's affecting all different aspects of all of our lives. And I don't really think there's any way that you can move forward or backward from that. There's only kind of rolling with it a little bit more.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Do you think doing online schoolwork? Is helping you be able to make that adjustment? Or does it feel like two completely different things?

Anabell Chavez

I would say that's actually been a really, really great help going into a position where I am working remote at times, I don't think I would have been able to do it if I didn't have that experience - doing remote classwork. And just getting comfortable with an online format has been a really big adjustment. And so yeah, I would say that that has definitely translated into a lot of different aspects, whether that's just you know, doing paperwork online, which you would normally be able to do in person or doing online DMV appointments, which is a crazy concept to me. But yeah, it kind of translates into everything that we're experiencing now, which is huge.

Dr. Heidi Muller

So one way a professional could kind of think about your online environment is that it is like, this is a practice environment for life, outside of it and structuring it in ways that the things you're doing be the kind of things you'd be doing in in in the real world, which may not be discussion boards all the time.

Catherine Maher  
Yeah. I hope not.

Dannon Cox  
Online citizenship. That's a real thing. Yeah, just you're a citizen in this virtual world that we are having to, I really liked what you said of just you can't take a step back from this. We just have to roll forward with it.

Catherine Maher  
I would agree with that. Like there's nothing you can do about it. And throughout, like even the past decade or so, technology has increased and improved so much, and it's only going to continue. So having these online classes definitely helped get accustomed to that. But I do have to note, please still go outside. For sure. Like it really helps. Like get sunlight. It'll, it's great.  
(laughter)

Dannon Cox  
That's science.

Catherine Maher  
Don't forget to do that!

Dannon Cox  
We hope you enjoyed this mini-series of The Online Classroom. This podcast was intended to introduce and showcase some of the unique but necessary changes for teaching and learning in an online environment. We shared stories and antidotes about what Canvas is, what it can do and not do. How it can support instructors deliver content, but most importantly, what we at IDD strive to do, which is provide the best learning experience we can for students. If you'd like to learn more about IDD, don't hesitate to reach out to us or visit some of our many resources online. That's the University of Northern Colorado Instructional Design and Development. Go Bears.

Thanks for listening. The Online Classroom is a production from the Instructional Design and Development team at the University of Northern Colorado. This podcast was hosted and edited by Dannon Cox. Music was created by AA Aalto, song, Balloons Rising and Podington Bear, song, Kitty in the Window.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>