Navigating Challenging Teaching Situations: Technology Tips and Tricks

University of Manitoba | The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning

Student and instructor interactions in the classroom can be both rewarding and challenging, especially in online environments. This document outlines common concerns around student behaviours when teaching and learning remotely as a supplement to workshops offered by Student Advocacy, the Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management, and The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. For more in-depth educational technology support, visit the Learning Technologies page on The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning's website.

It is important to note that in addition to the strategies offered below, many pedagogical practices can proactively address difficult behaviour. For instance, setting guidelines for classroom behaviour at the start of the semester opens a conversation and leads to greater participation among the entire classroom community. For more information, contact The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning.

Live videoconferencing sessions

Many instructors use live videoconferencing sessions as a replacement for in-person class sessions, tutorials, and office hours. Each platform has security features and support documentation to help instructors develop security protocols and respond in the moment to problematic situations. Using Webex or Zoom through UM Learn also reduces the chance that someone outside of the course will gain access to the meeting link.

Meeting setup:
- Understand what privileges students have by default (e.g., screen sharing, chat, saving and printing meeting materials) and consider restricting in advance.
- Only share meeting links privately with those who need them (e.g., guest speakers)
- Consider using a waiting room or locking a meeting after a certain time.
- Share your reasoning with students if standard features (e.g., chat) are disabled.

During a meeting:
- Familiarize yourself with how to mute participants, remove chat or screensharing privileges, and remove participants.
- Encourage students to alert you if they see something you've missed (e.g., a participant using an inappropriate virtual background).
- Know how to quickly suspend all participant activity or end a meeting.

After a meeting:
- Follow up with individual students and/or appropriate UM offices if policy violations have occurred.
- Check in with yourself and others in the session to process what happened; reach out to wellness supports as needed.

Student activity in UM Learn

UM Learn is the hub for asynchronous teaching and learning activities.

Discussion boards:
- Consider using a moderated discussion board that requires posts be approved by the instructor prior to being made public.
- Know how to delete posts, but also follow up with students to discuss the impact of problematic material.

Classlist:
- If used responsibly, the Classlist is a great way for students to connect with one another.
- If students' use of the Classlist tool is problematic, instructors can disable it or hide the link in the navigation bar.

Email management

Whether teaching in-person or remotely, email has become the primary form of communication between instructors and students out of the classroom.

- Remind students of the UM Student Email Policy and Use of Computer Facilities Policies early in the semester and refer back to these policies as needed.
- Have a class conversation about professional email practices.
- Refer threatening, abusive, harassing, emails to the IST Service Desk.

Social media

Students are increasingly using social media as a way of communicating with each other about their courses.

- Students may create a Telegram/WhatsApp/other social media group for your course.
- Consider whether you would like to ask students if you can join; this does not mean you are responsible for the group.
- Remind students that since there is a significant connection to university activity, UM policies on student behaviour still apply (e.g, Respectful Work and Learning Environment, academic integrity violations, etc.) and will be enforced.

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