SYNCHRONOUS CASE TEACHING

MANAGING THE DISCUSSION

1 ESTABLISHING RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

It is a good idea to establish rules of engagement upfront. An orderly approach is necessary not only to reduce the audio chaos of multiple speakers, but to allow you to remain in charge of the conversation and to ensure that a range of views is surfaced.

See the following pages for tips and tools on effectively managing online case-based discussions.

Sample norms of engagement:

◊ Discussion should be respectful at all times.

◊ Class must be a safe space for expressing varied opinions.

◊ Interruptions should be avoided.

◊ Students should follow agreed upon norms (such as hand-raising) when they want to speak and mute their microphones except when speaking.

ENSURING EQUITY

Consider tracking student participation, with an eye to making equity adjustments and to ensure that over time, all students get an equal chance to participate.

USING VISUAL SIGNALS

You might need to create an additional set of rules to support more spontaneous peer-to-peer interactions. For instance, what if a student wants to respond to a comment just made by a classmate, before the moment passes? In such a situation, you could ask students to raise both hands on camera. Or, if your videoconference includes reaction symbols, you might designate one symbol to signify "respond to a comment just made."

MANAGING PASSIONATE DISCUSSION

If discussion becomes heated, you may need to step in immediately to re-assert the rules. For example, you might say, "I know that passions run high on this topic, but I'm going to stop you there and ask you to either rephrase or pass the baton. A reminder that everyone in this class is to be treated with respect…" You could also address infractions after class, in a private message.

2 GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR ONLINE CASE DISCUSSION

REIMAGINE DISCUSSION BLOCKS OR "PASTURES"

Just as in an in-person case discussion, you will want to think carefully about what questions to pose to the class. Typically, working backward from the learning goals for the session, you will want to limit yourself to 2 to 4 topic areas, discussion blocks or "pastures." Within each pasture, you may ask questions, stage role-plays, set up debates, conduct polls, send students into small groups for discussion or other activities. In an online class, variety, surprise, compelling content, and active assignments with deliverables will help hold your students' interest.

"CHUNK" THE DISCUSSION

One of the general recommendations for online classes is to "chunk" the material you are presenting—that is, divide it into discrete, tightly focused units of 10 to 20 minutes. In that regard, most case-based classes—divided into 2 to 4 discussion pastures—are already well-suited for online teaching. Making a special point to mark the beginning and end of each discussion pasture may help to underscore the structure of the session. You may want to provide (or solicit from students) a mini-wrap after each discussion pasture.

ENERGIZE PEER-TO-PEER INTERACTION

In an online case-discussion peer-to-peer interactions might require more intentional facilitation. Consider using a simple relay technique to foster spontaneous peer-to-peer conversations. Begin with a question and identify the first student to respond. After responding, the first student in turn calls on a second student to carry the discussion forward. The second student has to respond to the statement made by the first student in one of three ways: a) I agree and, b) I agree but, or c) I disagree because, and call on the next student and so on.

THE ALL-IMPORTANT WRAP

Online or in-person, you will want to end with a "wrap" that ties the discussion together and underscores the generalizable lessons from the case. When teaching cases online: consider ending your session by inviting students to type into the Chat feature their key takeaways, and things they are left wondering about.
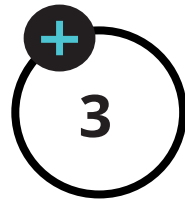
3 MAXIMIZING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH "WARM CALLS"

An issue that inevitably comes up for any instructor: What to do about the fact that some students volunteer to speak often, while others rarely volunteer to do so. An online case-based class can exacerbate this problem, as students can find it easier to avoid being called on or turn off their cameras. Some teachers like to "cold call" in a traditional class (calling on students without warning, which motivates them to come to class prepared), and continue to do so successfully online. Another approach is to make "warm calls" (either asking a student ahead of time if you can call on them to address a particular question—or warning them that you plan to do so).

Warm calls pair nicely with another student preparation technique: students making pre-class responses which you preview before discussion. You may notice, for instance, that two students have opposing viewpoints, and could tap each of them for a "warm call" to share their divergent thoughts.

Employ warm calls when a particular student has a background or expertise relevant to the case study.

Consider using warm calls as a way to ensure there are equitable opportunities to participate in class that do not rely on students to assert a wish to speak. Where possible, teaching assistants can help keep track of student participation and note any patterns.