

Recommendations for the Implementation of Learning Assistants in Online Settings in Response to Covid -19

Course Structure

In order to achieve comparable results in an online setting versus a classroom setting you must consider how the following facets of your class are impacted by the change:

- **Synchronicity** - Students in class are engaging with the faculty in real time (synchronous) but in an online setting students may elect to engage with material in their own time (asynchronously). Do you want to maintain your online course synchronously or asynchronously? What will that decision mean for your activities and level of engagement? How do you want your LAs to engage with the course?
- **Level of Integration** – How essential is the active learning component of the course to students achieving their outcomes? If your in-person class requires active learning for success then implementing an online version of your course in which the active learning is optional or poorly integrated will not produce the same results. It may be useful to consider how LAs can provide continuity of interaction and group dialogue within the online format.
- **Course Materials** – The same material in an in-person class will not always produce the same results in an online setting. You must consider how your course material will translate to the online setting. LAs can be useful resources in reviewing these materials from a student’s perspective and providing feedback.
- **Engagement** - In the classroom you structure your active learning sessions to promote group activity and learning by maximizing engagement but online the level of distraction is higher. How will your activities maintain the student’s attention? You may want to consider having LAs help to create more varied content, such as videos instead of slide decks, to encourage students to remain engaged.
- **Formative Assessment** - In person you can ask questions as you go that gauge if the students are understanding but online how you monitor student engagement and understanding may be different. How will you monitor the student’s understandings as they move through the material? A discussion board dedicated to student questions, which can be reviewed by LAs on a regular basis can provide an effective “back channel” for continuing to monitor students’ understanding.

Below are some more details about ways the LAs might be used to help facilitate active learning in the online format.

A. Asynchronous Solutions

- a. **Discussion Boards** – Many of our active learning scenarios involve students discussing materials or working on problems in a group. In the room there may be dozens of conversations happening at once which is where the faculty and the LA would work together to circulate and monitor those conversations. Online course management tools like Sakai and Canvas have discussion boards and forums to allow a similar kind of interaction. These forums can get messy when not managed strategically, because all of the disparate conversations that would be happening in

a classroom are captured in writing. Monitoring these discussion boards is an excellent role for the learning assistants. Consider setting minimums for the students to ensure the discussion board is well utilized (e.g – you must comment at least 3 times). This will also make it easy to assign participation points.

- b. Peer Reviews** – Canvas supports a peer review function where the instructor is able to assign students to review each other's work. In a similar fashion to the discussion boards, LAs are useful for examining the interactions between the peer reviewers and facilitating deeper conversations. You can set students to have more than one peer reviewer, or a peer reviewer and a TA (or LA, in this case).
 - c. Collaborative note taking** – Students work together to take notes for the class on a shared document. This allows the students to work together to make sure the notes are complete and the LA is able to facilitate the process to ensure accuracy of the notes
 - d. Document Sharing** – The google suite allows groups of students to co-create and coedit documents, slides and spreadsheets. Since all the students have access to google through their scarlet mail accounts this tool can be utilized for active group work asynchronously or synchronously
- B. Synchronous Lectures/Recitations** – If you plan on having your students attend a live version of your lectures/recitations there are ways to utilize the LAs to maintain the active/cooperative learning in a similar way that you would run a normal in-person lecture or recitation. A useful reference for using peer leaders for synchronous active learning can be found here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/tea.21163>
- a. Question Feeds** - Having a questions feed during your synchronous online lectures allows the students to ask questions in real time. The learning assistants are in an excellent position to moderate these question feeds to answer questions, and facilitate discussion in the chat. Free softwares like Piazza provide an easy questions feed solution and most webinar software, such as Big Blue Button and Webex, have a chat function.
 - b. Online Group Work** – Big Blue Button, which is an online meeting software that integrates directly with Canvas and Sakai, allows instructors to place student participants into group rooms. The instructors and the LAs can then move in between the group rooms and facilitate the group work in much the same way as they would if the students are working in groups in a classroom. The software also allows the students to share their screen with their group members so they show each other what they are working on.
 - c. Polling** – Similar to the use of clickers in an in-person lecture, many online platforms, such as Webex, having polling features. You and your LAs can poll your students during synchronous online lectures in a similar way to how you would poll them in class.

- C. **Synchronous Study Groups** – Learning assistants will continue to offer their study groups online in a synchronous fashion. LAs will receive guidance on the use of Big Blue Button. If your course does not currently utilize study groups but you would like to have the LAs run synchronous study groups as you move your course online please contact me at: corey.ptak@rutgers.edu.

How do I implement these Ideas?

Rutgers has licenses for many online tools that have varying degrees of integration with canvas and sakai. These can be found on the website of the Education Technology Office:

<https://tlt.rutgers.edu/instructional-technology-tools?page=1>.

A. Enabling Online teaching tools on Canvas

Log on to your canvas page for your course.

In the side men select Settings

Select the Navigations tab

The top list is features that you currently have enabled for you course. The list below are available features. To enable a feature, find the feature in the list and click the “...” icon next to it. You can then select enable to add it to your course

B. Some useful tools for online active learning included on canvas:

1. **Conferencing** – Uses big blue button as a video conferencing tools. This will allow the instructor to have virtual synchronous meetings for their class. The conferencing tool allows you to add all students or specific students to the room.

Useful Features:

- Chat function for students to ask questions during class if they do not feel comfortable speaking up and the Las are excellent moderators of the chat.
- Breakout Rooms - the instructor can create up to 8 break out rooms in the conference in order to put students into groups to collaborate on small group work during the class time. You can assign Las to groups to help facilitate
- Shared Notes - A collaborative note taking feature where students work together to take notes for the class. This is another useful place for the LA to moderate
- Recording – Allows the instructor to record video of the session and post it to canvas for students to review later
- Polling – Allows the instructor to ask questions to gauge student participation and understanding. This operates in a similar way to clickers or polling software’s in lecture.
- Screen Sharing – Instructors and students are able to share what is on their screens
- Embedding presentations and videos – The instructor can directly embed their presentations and share external videos into the conference room without the need for students to open a separate window

- Multiuser White Board – This is a multi-user whiteboard feature that allows students and instructors to annotate things on their screen. The instructor can choose to have the whiteboard open to students then by toggling the multiuser function. This is very useful when asking the students to examine or annotate images or diagrams or when students are working collaboratively on a document the instructor has embedded in the conference.
2. **Discussions** – enables a discussion board. The instructor will need to create topics within the discussion board
 3. **Piazza** – An online questions feed where the students can ask and answer each other’s questions. An excellent feature for using learning assistants
 4. **Top hat** – A polling software
 5. **Collaborations** – Utilizes googles suite of collaborative tools to enable students to work on shared documents, presentations and spreadsheets. The instructor can assign students to groups using the collaborate feature and monitor their progress
- C. **Free Online tools:** The LA program keeps a list of useful active learning softwares. Here are some links you might find useful in reworking your lesson plans to an online format.

Interactive Quizzing and Polling:

- Quizlet: <https://quizlet.com/teachers>
- Kahoot: <https://kahoot.com/>
- Poll Everywhere:
<https://www.polleverywhere.com/>
- Plickers: <https://get.plickers.com/>

Digital Whiteboards

- EDUcreations:
<https://www.educreations.com/>
- Notability:
<https://www.gingerlabs.com/>

Concept Mapping

- Bubble.Us: <https://bubbl.us/>

Interactive Graphing/ quantitative tools

- WolframAlpha:
<https://www.wolframalpha.com/>
- Desmos: <https://teacher.desmos.com/>

Simulations/ Online Labs

- Phet Interactive Simulations:
<https://phet.colorado.edu/en/simulations/category/by-level/university>
- Gizmos:
<https://www.explorelarning.com/>