

Top 5 Suggestions for Moving Your Course Online



Transitioning your teaching online--especially if you are pressed for time and resources--can feel overwhelming. And although there are countless tools and strategies available to explore, it can be challenging to find those that will provide maximum benefit to you and your learners. Whether you have weeks to prepare or just a few days, the five suggestions below are best practices that can be implemented quickly.

1 Utilize your goals and learning outcomes.

- **WHAT:** Review your overarching goals for the course and learning outcomes for units/sessions. Note that you may need to reconsider the overall scope based on new constraints.
- **HOW:** With an eye on learning outcomes, infuse opportunities to check for understanding throughout each meeting. These might include asking for “thumbs up” before moving on or launching a poll with a question that checks for comprehension.

2 Reimagine your delivery.

- **WHAT:** Successful online class meetings are designed for “lean forward learning” that draws learners in and engages them throughout.
- **HOW:** To make your class meetings more learner-centered, focus on transforming some of your didactic content into pre-work. Assign pre-recorded lectures or other videos, cases and articles, or asynchronous online discussions, and then focus class time on active learning experiences, such as a structured team assignment in breakout rooms followed by a facilitated, whole-group debrief. You may find additional inspiration from the flipped classroom model, as well as the “before and after” examples here.

3 Pace yourself.

- **WHAT:** A perfectly-timed lesson that you’ve traditionally delivered in a face-to-face context will take longer to deliver online. Plan ahead by scaling back your teaching plans, especially in the first few sessions.
- **HOW:** When you are delivering didactic content remotely, be sure to punctuate it with breaks and interactivity every 10-15 minutes. Where you may have previously delivered a 45-minute lecture before pausing for discussion, consider using an interval approach that intersperses varying levels of learner activity throughout.
- **HOW:** Consider what types of cues you generally rely on in a physical classroom (learners’ body language, a clock at the back of the room, etc.) and how these will impact your time-keeping while teaching remotely.

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4 Set and reinforce norms.

- **WHAT:** Norm-setting often happens rather organically in a physical classroom - learners are accustomed to standards of engagement (e.g., raising a hand to ask a question), and instructors provide context-specific guidance (e.g., “Let’s hold all questions until the end of this section.”). In remote class meetings, the rules of engagement can vary dramatically between settings. Setting clear norms allows you to save time from time-consuming hiccups, but also offers the opportunity to foster a sense of community in your class.
- **HOW:** Develop a simple set of norms and expectations to share with your learners before or during your first class meeting, and enforce them consistently. You may wish to solicit input from learners before or during the course to inform these norms. *For a helpful list of questions to prompt your norm-setting, as well as strategies for communicating and reinforcing norms, visit [this resource](#).*

5 Get some help.

- **WHAT:** Instructors who are new to teaching on Zoom often experience cognitive overload as they juggle presenting their content, managing the chat, facilitating discussion, and administering polls and breakout rooms.
- **HOW:** If you have a co-instructor, TA, or administrator to assist with in-person sessions, clearly define roles and responsibilities before the first class meeting. A dress rehearsal or “stress test” of interactive features is especially helpful. Alternatively, consider appointing one learner per session to manage some of these features, such as monitoring and sharing out from the chat.

This resource summarizes the best practices honed by Harvard Catalyst's Postgraduate Education Program, as well as those developed and disseminated by:

Harvard University's TeachRemotely, The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, the Harvard Division of Continuing Education, Harvard Business School Publishing, Harvard University IT, University of Queensland eLearning Systems and Support

Engaging Learners Online: Best Practices for Maximizing Participation

Description

One of the greatest challenges in teaching remotely is effectively engaging your learners. And while most web-conferencing platforms allow you to easily launch a poll, take questions from the audience, and incorporate multimedia, these strategies must be thoughtfully leveraged in order to support (and not distract from) your teaching.

This curated set of video clips highlights great teaching moments excerpted from Harvard Catalyst's webinar series, [Building a Successful C/T Research Career](#). In each clip, a seasoned instructor successfully employs a simple online teaching strategy to increase engagement and emphasize key takeaways. Along with each clip, we provide context for how and when to implement a given strategy, highlight best practices for execution, and share additional resources and tips.

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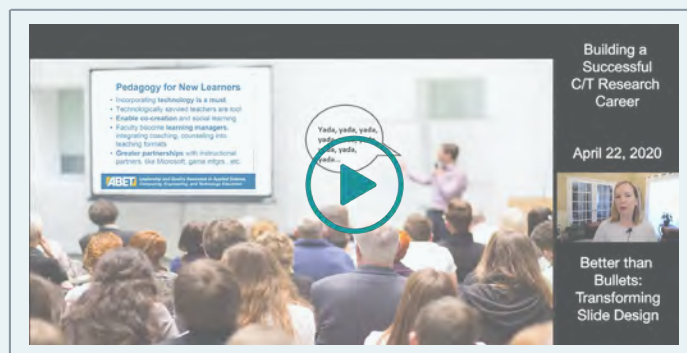
Best Practices for Maximizing Participation



Running Effective Polls

Polls provide the opportunity to engage with learners and receive immediate feedback. However, they do take time away from your talk, so it is important to craft meaningful poll questions that will help you do one or more of the following: learn about your audience's needs, interests, or background knowledge; reinforce or summarize a key takeaway; foreshadow or highlight an upcoming concept.

In this clip from “Better than Bullets: Transforming Slide Design,” communications expert Melissa Marshall of [Present Your Science](#) uses a poll question to help introduce and illustrate the concept of cognitive load.



Highlights

- Prepare the audience for the upcoming poll.
- Open the poll and read aloud the question and answers.
- While the poll is running, provide progress updates and encourage responses.
- Close the poll and share/describe the results.
- Integrate poll results into the talk. Describe why you asked the question and how the results speak to a key takeaway from the session.



Tip

Streamline your facilitation by creating polls in the Zoom web portal before your meeting begins. You can edit your polls at anytime without interrupting registration.

Resources

- For more information on how to set up, launch, close, and view reports from your polls in Zoom **Meetings**, visit: [Zoom Help Center- Polling for Meetings](#)
- For more information on how to set up, launch, close, and view reports from your polls in Zoom **Webinars**, visit: [Zoom Help Center- Polling for Webinars](#)

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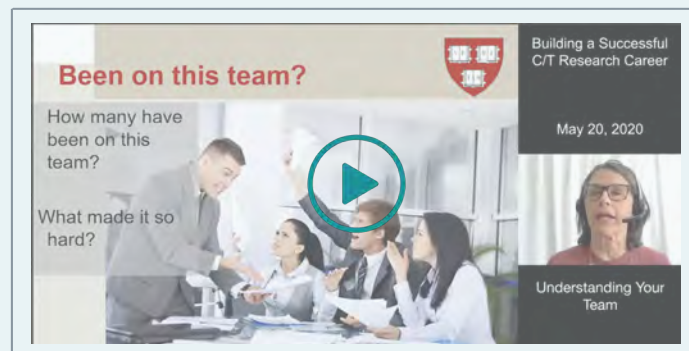
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Facilitating a Chat Discussion

The chat feature allows for discussion to take place without the need to call on audience members or ask them to unmute themselves. It is an especially convenient way to engage learners by collecting their reactions and feedback, as well as sharing individual questions and experiences.

In this clip from her talk about understanding diverse communication styles, Professor Mary Shapiro begins with a series of engaging questions designed to help audience members relate their own experiences to the topic at hand.



Highlights

- Ask questions that require short answers in order to lessen wait time.
- Follow the responses as they come in, identifying and highlighting themes.
- Share a variety/diversity of responses.
- React to incoming feedback and responses to encourage further contributions. Active listening skills such as nodding, gesturing, and summarizing demonstrate that you are engaged.
- Transition back to talking points by highlighting what these responses show or suggest to us, and how they relate to your next point.

Resources

- For available options in configuring chat in Zoom **Meetings**, visit: [Zoom Help Center- Using In-Meeting Chat](#)
- For available options in configuring chat in Zoom **Webinars**, visit: [Zoom Help Center- Using Webinar Chat](#)

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Conducting Meaningful Diagnostics & Self-Assessments

A brief self-diagnostic tool, rubric, or checklist is a great way to help audience members learn something about themselves in the context of a particular topic or self-assess their background knowledge. While these tools cannot be created directly in Zoom, they can be designed on external websites, such as Qualtrics, and then linked in the chat.

In this talk on negotiation skills, Ombudsperson Melissa Brodrick uses a survey to help participants identify their negotiation style(s). The intentionally brief survey provides a quiet moment of self-reflection for participants, and the subsequent poll and discussion serves to summarize and expand on the group's results.



Highlights

- Define the “ask” of the audience on a simple slide. Indicate how long you expect the exercise to take, and keep track of the time while they are completing it.
- Provide a way for participants to share what they learned (in this case, a poll).
- Describe the origin of the exercise and why it is relevant to the discussion at hand.
- Expand on or summarize the diagnostic instrument and how the information learned is helpful as you proceed with the talk.



Tip

Use a software that will allow you to follow along with responses (e.g. Qualtrics) to inform when to describe results and proceed with the session.

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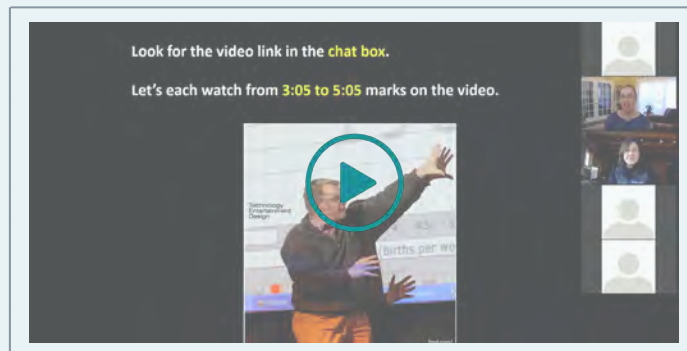
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Incorporating Video Content

Pre-recorded or found video can help punctuate a talk and give both you and your audience a moment to pause and hear another voice. Clips should be selected thoughtfully - they should introduce, summarize, or expand upon something fundamental in your talk. And they should be brief enough so as not to draw too much time away.

In this excerpt from a session on powerful presentations, communications expert Melissa Marshall of [Present Your Science](#) invites the audience to watch a short video clip. This provides an opportunity to reinforce concepts from earlier in her talk, as well as foreshadow what she'll be discussing next.



Highlights

- Cue the audience to look for a link to the video in the chat, and give parameters for viewing (length of time, when to start/stop, what to do when you're finished).
- Call the audience back together and refocus their attention in Zoom.
- Explain what was happening in the clip and how it reinforces the principles described earlier in the talk.
- Use the video as a way to transition into the next part of the talk.



Tip

Provide a link to the video in the chat rather than playing the video and screensharing it. Video quality is much lower when it is screenshared.

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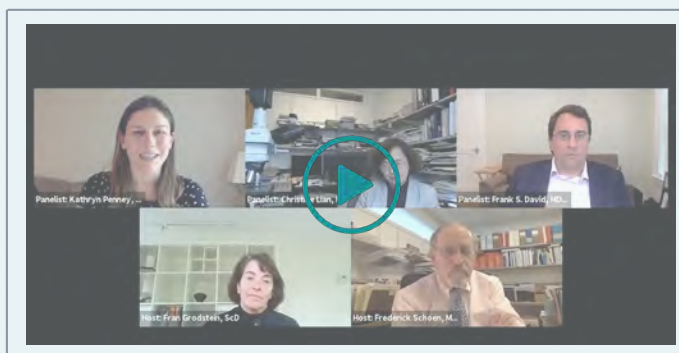
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Hosting A Panel Discussion

When a given concept or topic is best addressed through multiple perspectives, a panel discussion can be an appropriate format. An effective panel discussion is well-structured around a series of key themes and takeaways, but is also flexible enough to reserve time for questions and comments from the audience.

In this excerpt from a panel discussion called “Strategies for Navigating Career Transitions: Advice from a Panel of Mid-Career Scientists,” Dr. Frederick Schoen effectively moderates the panelists’ responses to a question submitted from the audience.



Highlights

- Read a question submitted by the audience, and select a panelist to begin their response. (One panelist’s experience may be particularly appropriate, or you may wish to hear from someone who has not spoken in the past few minutes.)
- Encourage panelists to draw on and build off of each others’ prior comments.
- Summarize key points and themes for emphasis before transitioning to the next question.



Tip

Designate additional “behind the scenes” staff as panelists, but instruct them to turn off their video and audio. This will give them full access to additional features, but they will not be visible to your participants. When using Zoom Webinars, panelists who turn their videos off are not seen by participants (even though they still can be seen by other panelists).

Resource

For additional information about the [Webinar Add-On](#), which is a good fit for most panel session setups, visit: [Zoom Help Center- Getting Started With Webinar](#)

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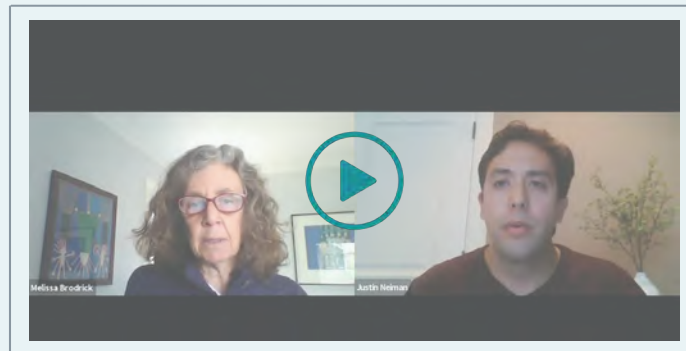
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Acting Out A Role-Play Scenario

Mini-cases, vignettes, and role play exercises can be engaging opportunities to illustrate challenging concepts and perspectives. For a role-play scenario, consider enlisting a colleague to serve as a partner. Design your dialogue around a loose script that allows for some ad-libbing without losing focus on the points you want to highlight.

In this clip from a negotiation skills webinar, Ombudsperson Melissa Brodrick and Associate Ombudsperson Justin Neiman enact a scenario that will be familiar to the audience, and then follow up with a discussion of “What went wrong?” to reinforce the key principles of negotiation.



Highlights

- Signal to the audience that they’re about to watch a scenario being acted out. Provide enough background on the situation.
- Use facial expressions, gesturing, body language, and eye contact to amplify language and dialogue.
- Lead a debrief conversation. Ask the audience to reflect on what they saw and facilitate connections between their observations and the key take-aways of the talk.



Tip

You can use the [spotlight video](#) feature to help your audience keep track of who is speaking when you have multiple speakers.

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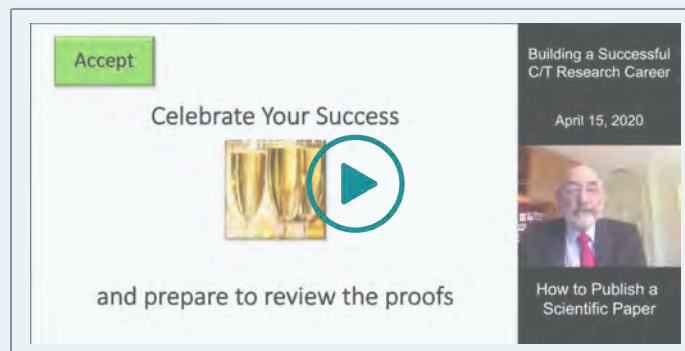
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Answering Audience Questions

An engaging talk is likely to yield many questions from participants, and Zoom offers a number of options for how you might collect those questions (in the chat, using the “raise hand” feature, or having audience members unmute themselves and jump in). If you’d like to streamline questions into a designated Q&A period at the end (or mid-point) of your talk, you may want to recruit a colleague to assist with collecting questions that come in to the chat throughout, and organizing/reading them out on your behalf.

In this clip, Dr. Elliott Antman wraps up his talk on scientific publications with a Q&A hosted by a colleague who has collected and organized the questions that came in throughout the preceding 45 minutes. As a result, he’s able to address the most representative questions and both reinforce and extend the key take-away points.



Highlights

- Invite whoever is assisting with Q&A to begin sharing out questions.
- Discuss in advance any preferences, such as a priority order for themes in questions or topics to avoid.

Resources

- For available options in configuring chat in Zoom **Meetings**, visit: [Zoom Help Center- Using In-Meeting Chat](#)
- For available options in configuring chat in Zoom **Webinars**, visit: [Zoom Help Center- Using Webinar Chat](#)
- For available options in configuring the Q&A feature in Zoom **Webinars**, visit: [Zoom Help Center-Getting Started with Question & Answer](#)

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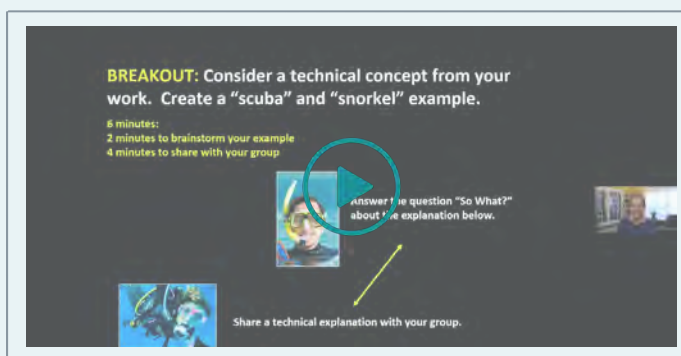
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Facilitating Small Group Discussions

Zoom’s “breakout groups” feature allows you to divide your audience up into groups (randomly or based on pre-selected preferences) for small group conversations and project work. However, in some contexts (such as large scale webinars), audience engagement in a small group discussion may be inconsistent, and you may find that the time to launch, hold, and then debrief a breakout discussion is not the best fit for your goals.

In this clip, communications expert Melissa Marshall of [Present Your Science](#) uses small groups in order to provide an opportunity for participants to practice a key skill related to her talk - simplifying complex topics for general audiences. Her set up, launch, and debrief of the breakout session are carefully designed to make the expectations and key-takeaways clear to the audience.



Highlights

- Orient people to what they can expect when the breakout rooms are launched.
- Provide (on a slide) a simple breakdown of how they should plan to spend their time, as well as a clearly defined deliverable.
- Welcome the audience back to the large group and pause to allow time to reorient/regroup.
- Ask the audience to share out their deliverables.
- Provide commentary on deliverables (shared examples) and tie back to the objectives for the exercise.



Tips

Broadcast messages to all breakout groups to provide reminders about deliverables or time. You can launch breakout rooms more than once in a single meeting, using the same or reconfigured groups.




Resource

For available options in configuring and managing breakout rooms in Zoom **Meetings**, visit: [Zoom Help Center- Managing Breakout Rooms](#)

Setting Norms for Your Online Learning Environment



Why set norms and expectations?

-  **Establish community.** You may consider inviting input on norms and expectations by sending out a brief survey to learners or spending time in your first session brainstorming and collaborating on the norms together.
-  **Formalize (or informalize) the environment.** Learners are well-accustomed to communicating and collaborating in online spaces that vary greatly in terms of their formality. Norms help set this tone.
-  **Save time.** Well-articulated norms anticipate and address the hiccups and delays that come with remote learning.

3 Steps: **1 Generate** **2 Disseminate** **3 Reinforce**

1 Generate

The statements below can be combined into a set of norms that you further customize and share with your learners. Choose the statements that best describe the norms you want to adopt and foster in your course.

Learning environment:

- Please be sure to have access to additional materials during each class session. *Note that this may require students to print materials ahead of time, use a secondary monitor, or toggle between the Zoom classroom and other materials on a single screen.*
- You are encouraged to take notes (with pen and paper or electronically).
- Please be sure you are familiar with the reaction buttons (thumbs up/down, raise hand, etc.).
- You may be asked to screen share with the class or in a small group.
- I suggest using...
 - Gallery view, which will allow you to see all of your colleagues and me on a single screen.
 - Active speaker view, which will enlarge the face of whoever is speaking.
Note that when screen sharing is enabled (for example, to show slides), gallery view includes only a handful of videos. Those with a secondary screen can view additional participants.

Your learning environment also includes other spaces--such as discussion boards--where learners collaborate and engage. These spaces benefit from their own norms and protocols.

Audio and video:

- a. Please keep your camera on, provided you are in an environment conducive to doing so. *You may wish to specify what is/is not an appropriate environment.*
- b. You may (or should) keep your camera off, but please update your profile with a headshot photo.
- c. Please keep your microphone muted until you are called upon.
- d. We will be using breakout rooms for small group work. Please turn on your camera and microphones in breakout rooms.

Discussions:

- a. If at any point you have a question or want to contribute to the discussion, please...
 - i. unmute yourself and chime in.
 - ii. use the raise hand button and wait to be called upon, at which point you can unmute yourself.
 - iii. type your question or comment in the chat.
- b. Please be prepared to be called upon throughout class. *You may wish to specify here if you plan to use traditional cold-calling, or provide a warning before calling on learners.*

Small group work:

You may wish to use breakout rooms to provide an opportunity for small-group work. Some norms for these exercises will be universal, and some may be particular to an individual exercise or session.

- a. Please turn on your camera and keep your microphone unmuted, provided you are in an area conducive to doing so.
- b. Expect [*insert applicable names here*] to sporadically join your breakout room to observe and/or offer feedback.
- c. If you have any questions during the breakout session, please use the Zoom chat to send a message to the host.
- d. Keep an eye on the clock to ensure that your deliverable(s) will be ready by the end of the allotted time. You can expect to receive a “wrap up” message [X] minutes before the breakout session ends.
- e. Use *any/all/one* of the following tools to collaborate on your work: screen sharing, whiteboard/annotation tools, Google doc or sheet, Office 365 (Word, PowerPoint, or Excel), our course website, etc.

If you'll be forming teams to work on group projects (especially those that will require meetings outside of class time), consider having each group discuss the norms of how they would like to operate and create a team charter. You can provide a simple template to ensure they reach agreement on critical factors for success. (For a comprehensive list of exercises and prompts for launching teams, [click here](#).)



2 Disseminate

- Ideally, your discussion and dissemination of norms will happen in your first class session, as you get participants oriented to the learning environment. If time is a constraint, you can communicate these norms over email or via your course website. (A useful template is provided [here](#).)
- Each time you launch a breakout session, provide a reminder of the breakout room norms (especially if they differ from your typical class norms).
- Post a list of class norms somewhere that is easy for learners to reference later, such as a course website.
- When you invite a guest speaker or auditor to participate in a session, share a list of your class norms so that they know not only what to expect of your learners, but what your learners are expecting of them.
- Ask learners for feedback on the norms (via a poll, survey, or class discussion) after the first few class sessions.

3 Reinforce

- Expect to spend some time in the first few sessions reinforcing the norms that have been set. Anticipate that learners are also adjusting to norms in other, similar settings and may need reminders.
- If you have access to an administrative support person or a TA, consider enlisting them to assist with reinforcing norms. This may include, for example, sending a private chat to a learner whose camera is off or muting a rogue microphone.

The tips and sample language provided in this resource are designed to help you craft and disseminate norms for new remote learning environments. They do not fully encompass the broad opportunities of norm setting in any environment (online or in person), which include creating group agreements that set aspirational goals for what you want to achieve as a class, as well as norms for specific class practices and exercises, such as discussions.

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Harvard University's TeachRemotely, The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, the Harvard Division of Continuing Education, the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Instructional Moves, The HBS Guide to Leading Teams, Columbia University's Center for Teaching and Learning, the Washington University in St. Louis Center for Teaching and Learning, William James College IT