

# What Students Want from Remote Learning

By Kelly Hogan

Many higher education instructors are returning to in-person teaching this fall. Educators and students alike do not necessarily want everything to be exactly like fall 2019. We have an opportunity to reflect before we begin—perhaps on ways to bring more inclusive practices to our teaching. I collected data from over 700 students on my campus and share with you a few tangible ideas that students expressed they wanted to see continued with the return to in-person teaching. I was thrilled to see that many of these ideas align with inclusive teaching strategies. Students would like to see a continuation of:

## Weekly emails from instructors that include required tasks, encouragements, and personal updates/reflections

*“Weekly emails made clear what we had to accomplish that week while also encouraging us.”*

With so many remote and asynchronous courses thrust upon them in the last year, many students were feeling overwhelmed and disconnected. In response,

some instructors implemented weekly emails to keep students on-task and motivated. This kind of structure is inclusive because it helps more students stay organized without harm to those that do not need reminders.<sup>1</sup> But we all appreciate reminders, right?

With in-person teaching, many educators use the beginning or end of class to make announcements about upcoming assignments. Even if all students are present, some will miss the oral messaging and will appreciate having the weekly run-down in a written form. Having both oral messaging and a weekly email message aligns with Universal Design in Learning, a framework for inclusion that provides diverse learners multiple ways to access materials.<sup>2</sup>

## A “live chat” feature with in-person classes

*“I enjoy the chat feature [in Zoom] and think it would be nice to have some kind of in-person version.”*

I had always done a great deal of polling of my students with their phones or laptops in my in-person classes, but the backchannel nature of live chat in



Zoom opened up new possibilities for communication in my course with hundreds of students. Some students who don't feel comfortable speaking aloud in class are eager to participate in written form, and I'm now left wondering how to implement this always-open back channel in my classroom where students can answer each other's questions and make free-flowing comments about the material being discussed. Some options to explore are Google Docs, GroupMe, Polleverywhere's pinned activities, Twitter, and Zoom chat. More options are discussed in this guide from the University of Guelph: <https://bit.ly/3hOuLHe>.

### Virtual office hours and review sessions

*"I think Zoom should be continued to be used for some activities. It helps save time for students and makes showing up to office hours more possible for me, as I can easily access Zoom from wherever I am."*

A summary of students' quotes demonstrates the value of virtual office hours and review sessions. Virtual sessions are more convenient, safer (without

needing to walk in the dark for late sessions), don't require office space/classrooms, and open up more times of the day. It is clear that some students still want in-person options, so we need to find the right balance with our students.

### Asynchronous days

*"I hope professors still include asynchronous days, every once in a while, just to give students a reprieve during the semester."*

While many of us are excited to be together in classrooms, students hope to see some asynchronous learning activities that they became familiar with during the pandemic. These may or may not replace an in-person session. What parts of our courses would benefit from asynchronous learning? Content that is lecture-based is useful in a prerecorded video or reading so students can go at their own pace. Similarly, some kinds of problem-solving and individual work are more inclusive in a self-paced format before collaboration can be successful. For many educators, the pandemic has made even clearer the value of using