



**ASSOCIATED STUDENTS  
OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY**

**Dear Faculty Member,**

This upcoming year will present opportunities to reimagine the classroom experience as we move beyond the bounds of the physical classroom. As a TA myself, I've already dedicated hours to training and brainstorming sessions for crafting an academically rigorous and inclusive learning environment. The impetus to create this document came from some of my own discussions with my professors who were curious about what students felt/needed during this time.

Teaching (and learning) online is a new experience and as we move through the year, it is my hope that we can work together to learn from our best and worst moments. Though we cannot entirely replace the in-person learning experience, we can aspire to recreate the professor-student relationships and academic integrity that brought us all to Stanford.

The questions included below were collected from the Faculty Senate and responses were provided by myself and then reviewed by ASSU representatives. They are purely our perspectives, and do not represent a "right" or "wrong" answer. We've also included helpful resources put together by the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Teaching Commons, and Teaching Resources. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact me at [viannavo@assu.stanford.edu](mailto:viannavo@assu.stanford.edu).

All my best,

Vianna Vo, ASSU Executive President



## **ASSU Recommendations on Online Teaching/Learning**

### Quick Links

1. [Key Links](#)
2. [What are best practices for breakout rooms?](#)
3. [How often should instructors include social/community building activities in class?](#)
4. [What would you like to see in terms of norms around cameras being on or off?](#)
5. [What interaction strategies and technical tools do you find most helpful for office hours?](#)
6. [What support do you wish your professors would provide?](#)
7. [What are best practices to make online courses accessible?](#)
8. [What norms would you like to see upheld in your classes more generally?](#)
9. [What is the optimal mix of synchronous/asynchronous instruction?](#)
10. [Additional Resources](#)

### **Key Links**

- [Center for Teaching and Learning](#) offers a portfolio of programs and services to advance teaching and learning
- [Teaching Commons](#) is designed for all members of the Stanford community (instructors, TAs, support staff) who are interested in learning, education, and pedagogy
- [Teaching Resources](#) offers dozens of stories, strategies, and research articles inspired by GSE instructors and students' transition to online classrooms
- [Stanford Spring Student Survey](#) presents results from a survey of enrolled students conducted by Stanford's Institutional Research & Decision Support (IR&DS). It includes questions related to online instruction, accessibility of resources, mental health & wellbeing, and finance, among other topics

### **What are best practices for breakout rooms?**

CTL Resource: [Structuring Group Work Online - Breakout Rooms](#)

Teaching Commons: [Successful Breakout Rooms](#)

Teaching Resources: [Zoom Breakout Room FAQs](#)

One good tactic to use in breakout rooms is to designate **1)** a facilitator, **2)** a reporter, and/or **3)** a note taker. You can easily select a facilitator with a clever heuristic such as



“the person with the closest birthday is the facilitator while the furthest is the reporter”.

Another trick is to have dedicated slides in the slide deck for each breakout room to edit. Share the link to the slide deck with the students, and each group can take notes on the discussion directly onto the slides. That way, it can also be a useful reference when students look back at class notes.

In terms of size, a breakout room size of 3-5 students seems to work well; larger breakout rooms sometimes don't allow for everyone to share their thoughts. It can also be helpful to post the discussion questions in the chat since students tend to forget what else professors asked after Question 1.

### **How often should instructors include social/community building activities in class (warm ups/check ins/out of class activities)?**

CTL Resource: [10 Strategies for Promoting Student Flourishing](#)

Teaching Commons: [Build Community](#)

Teaching Resources: [Informal trust-building in an online environment](#)

At the ASSU, we like to start our meetings with a wellness check-in. It can be as simple as “rate how you’re doing on a scale of 1 to 5” by using a Zoom poll, dropping a one-word mood in the chat, or more involved such as breaking into breakout rooms. Another option could be letting students know that your Zoom room will be open 10 minutes before and after class. It may also be a good idea to have some sort of check-in question halfway through a class that’s any longer than an hour. This serves as an attention check, while also providing short breaks to prevent students' minds from drifting too far from class.

Other fun activity ideas:

- Ask students to edit their name in Zoom to include one word about how they’re feeling (i.e. “Vianna - excited”)
- Ask a short series of questions and ask students to raise their hand if it applies to them (i.e. “Raise your hand if you are currently in CA”; “raise your hand if you haven’t left your house in over 24 hours”; etc.)
- Greet students as they come into the Zoom room, just as you would normally



## ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY

- Ask students whether they would like your teaching team to organize a chat group (i.e. GroupMe, Slack, Piazza, etc.) for students to form study groups; it's a bit harder to find study buddies in an online classroom
- Hold an optional "social hour" before class, giving students the opportunity to join a few minutes or up to an hour early. Students can use this time to ask questions or talk to each other. Set up breakout rooms for group work to overcome scheduling difficulties in light of different time zones

### **What would you like to see in terms of norms around cameras being on or off?**

Stanford Daily Op-Ed: [Please Let Students Turn Off Their Videos in Class](#)

Online Article: [5 reasons to let students keep their cameras off during Zoom classes](#)

We encourage teaching teams to hold flexible policies when it comes to having cameras being on or off. We've linked several articles above on why, but here's a quick summary:

1. Zoom fatigue is real. We generally have around 5 hours of Zoom calls per day...and then we need to keep staring at our computers to finish our assignments. Turning off the camera can help make our days more manageable.
2. Some students may not have quiet, distraction-free environments. Being at home means we might have to multi-task and help take care of our siblings, or cook meals for our families. Please recognize that there could be additional responsibilities that we may need to take on and that we'll be listening in even if our cameras aren't on
3. Some of us don't have strong enough WiFi to support video.

If you really want to encourage keeping video on, we understand. The classroom does feel a bit more lively when it's filled with faces rather than black squares. What one of our professors did last quarter was ask students to keep video on as default, but feel free to message him if they'd like to take video off for the day (i.e. "feeling tired today and will have my video off", "have to cook, but will be listening in!"). No matter what you choose, we recommend clearly communicating your expectations and going over it in class.

### **What interaction strategies and technical tools do you find most helpful for office hours (where you work with an instructor or CA) when working with course materials involving visualization, e.g. in the form of diagrams and equations?**

CTL Resource: [10 Strategies for Making Virtual Office Hours More Effective](#)



## ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Teaching Resources: [Office Hours in an Online World](#)

Lathrop Learning Hub: [Borrow Equipment](#)

This part is a bit tricky, especially for STEM classes that usually depend on blackboards/whiteboards. Here are a few tricks:

- Use an iPad or other tablet/touchscreen device as a digital whiteboard. Check out the Learning Hub (linked above) to borrow equipment
- Screen-Share your notes and use the annotate function from Zoom to write directly on the slides with your computer mouse. Point your camera at your home blackboard/whiteboard. You may need to write larger than usual. Double-check you have turned off mirroring for the Zoom video settings so that your words aren't shown backwards on the video

### **What support do you wish your professors would provide? (e.g., flexible office hours, social activities with the class, flexible deadlines, etc)**

CTL Resource: [10 Strategies for Creating Inclusive and Equitable Online Learning Environments](#)

Teaching Commons: [Rethinking Assignments](#)

Our two main requests for this are to have generally flexible policies and to give at least two free absences, no questions asked. One professor did this last quarter and it did wonders for relieving stress when outside emergencies popped up. The “no questions asked” part is especially appreciated because it can be re-traumatizing to explain to several professors over and over what personal circumstances prevent you from coming to class that day. We're sure you can sympathize that students are encountering reasons that they need to miss class with greater frequency.

It's also good to offer discussion sections at various times to accommodate for time zones. We encourage you to have a form for students to submit questions if they are unable to make it to office hours, and to have a document where students can find their questions answered.

### **What are best practices to make online courses accessible?**

OAE Resources: [Faculty & Teaching Staff](#)

Teaching Commons: [Crash Course in Accessibility](#)



## ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Students should email you their accommodations letters shortly after class begins, if not before the first day. Reply, letting them know that you're open to having a conversation about their specific needs, if they're comfortable with that. At the very least, express that you'll take any questions, comments, and/or concerns into account. Remember that just because you've taught a student with similar needs in the past, does not mean that your present students' needs are the same; the part is not the same as the whole.

We encourage you to understand that some students rely on assistive technology that is incompatible with various features on Zoom. For example, students can use the "Annotation" feature to write directly on slides. To ensure equal access to information, please use the chat feature or read out loud the takeaways from the exercise. Students using assistive technology will not be able to read the annotations on the slides.

Here are some tips and tricks:

- Use automatic [Closed Captioning with Google Slides](#)
- Use Canvas modules instead of Canvas files for readability
- Provide multiple ways to access materials (i.e. both the PDF and the link to access the file)
- Provide transcripts and recordings of lectures to students
- Read any questions that you expect answers (either textually via the chat or verbally) aloud, in case the screen-share isn't working and also for accessibility purposes

### **What norms would you like to see upheld in your classes more generally?**

CTL Resource: [What I Wish My Professor Knew](#)

Teaching Commons: [Build Community](#) and [Set Norms](#)

Teaching Resources: [Community Building Activities for Agreement and Norm Setting](#)

Do not be afraid to acknowledge the moment. We do not exist in a bubble, and events outside the classroom do impact how we are able to learn and function as students. In the past, we've been frustrated when professors have continued teaching without pausing to acknowledge outside events such as losing a Stanford student to suicide, or the racial injustice that is sweeping through our country. We know that it's sometimes difficult to navigate acknowledging the moment and also feeling unequipped to do so. While there are many resources you can draw on, you can always reach out to us.



## ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Additionally, be clear about what the expectations are for the course, assignments, and interactions within the class, particularly how they might differ from previous years. In the virtual learning environment, what do you feel--based on each individual assignment and the guidance from the BJA on the Honor Code--constitutes a violation?

Remember that speaking up in class for many takes confidence, in ourselves as well as other members of the class, to be respectful. Actively working to build class rapport, helping us get to know each other, and productively challenging comments are ways to help grow that sense of trust so that conversations may be more robust.

### **What is the optimal mix of synchronous/asynchronous instruction?**

CTL Resource: [Teaching Students in Multiple Time Zones](#)

Teaching Commons: [Find a Mix of Synchronous and Asynchronous Teaching](#)

As students, we would ideally like to attend all classes live since we can interact with our classmates/professors and ask questions as they come up. However, there are times where 100% synchronous participation is not possible. Here, we ask that the teaching team examine what makes sense pedagogically while also extending accommodations to those who would really like to take the course, but cannot do so synchronously.

Here are some example accommodations that we found particularly successful:

- For every class session missed, write a short paragraph (3-5 sentences) about main takeaways from class
- Set up office hour sessions for any additional questions

This format was able to work for both lecture- and discussion-based classes. Please remember that for some students, especially international students, it simply isn't possible to attend class live. Maximizing flexibility in synchronous/asynchronous instruction allows students to continue pursuing their educational goals while maintaining their well-being.

### **Additional Resources**

The following are links to current guidance and best practices provided by the University. Please be familiar with and follow guidance from the following:





**ASSOCIATED STUDENTS  
OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY**

- [Guidance on Exam Accommodations During Remote Instruction](#) is a list of resources and advice for preparing for, and taking, exams during remote instruction
- [The Honor Code](#) via OCS website, which guides what constitutes a cheating violation and the process that all community members agree to, as well as how it's applied
- [BJA Guidance for the Remote Teaching and Learning Environment](#) includes updates to Honor Code application, in light of virtual learning environment
- [Our Fundamental Standard](#), designed to guide behaviors of all members of the Stanford community, as well as info on how it's applied