

Professor Corner

January 2021 Faculty Highlight: Katie Gerst, Associate Professor of Practice, Academic Director – Fox Honors Program, Assistant Academic Director – OMBA & OBBA Programs

Department: Marketing and Supply Chain Management



Katie Gerst – Online Engagement Tools

Katie's Tools for Online Engagement

I use breakout rooms a lot – I’ve adapted most of the activities that I normally use in the classroom to work in breakout rooms. I also try to use current events as examples to generate class discussions. But one of the best ways I’ve found to engage online is to add the human factor, whether that be logging on early or staying late and chatting with them or even just checking in with a “hey, how is everyone doing?”.

- Breakout Room Activities
- Discussion Boards
- In Class Activities
- The Human Factor

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Breakout Room Activities:

- Editing Activities – I teach a writing course, Business Communications, so sometimes I put documents on Canvas with a bunch of long-winded sentences or paragraphs and have students edit them to make them more concise.
- Hands-on Practical Activities (with a spin) – I sometimes ask students to apply what we’re discussing in preparation for an assignment, but I make it a fun or cheesy example. For example, in Business Communications, students have to write an email in which they are delivering bad news. In small groups, I have them write an email breaking up with someone using the same formula of delivering bad news.
- Small Group Discussions – sometimes I’ll give students an article or other reading with a set of discussion questions. They discuss in groups of 3 or 4 and then bring their discussion back to the larger class.

Discussion Boards:

- Devil’s Advocate – I ask students to post to a discussion board. But then I have them respond to each other and to play devil’s advocate. They have to write why they disagree with something the original post said. Here’s an example from my Integrative Marketing Communications course:
 - Select an advertisement from a magazine, TV, online, outdoor, mobile ad, etc...any advertising vehicle is fine. List the brand name and what they are selling. Briefly describe the ad. Then, use the e-text to identify the message strategy(s) (figure 6.1), type of appeal(s) (figure 6.3) and type of executional framework used (figure 6.10). Do you feel the ad is designed effectively? Explain your reasoning either way. Your example(s) must be new and not a reiteration of the example(s) discussed in class, in the video recordings, or in another classmate's post; otherwise points will be deducted for lack of originality.
 - You must also comment on the post of one of your classmates. This means if you’re the first to post, you’ll need to come back later and look through your classmates’ posts. Pick any response you want and play “devil’s advocate” and explain why you disagree with their assessment of the effectiveness of the ad. It could be that you think the whole ad is ineffective. Or it could be that you think one component of the ad is ineffective. Just please remember to be nice – you can disagree and still be nice and respectful.

In Class:

- **Interactive Quizzes:** I sometimes make fun quizzes – I like to say they’re just for giggles – that relate to a topic and have the students do them interactively. For example, for a discussion on cross cultural communication, I created a quiz of questions about business practices in other countries. I tell the students it’s just for giggles and all they have to do is guess. They use the green check, red x, slow down, and speed up buttons to answer.
- **Large Group Discussions:** I like to focus on current events and how they relate to class when I can. So sometimes I’ll post an article and/or videos and have students read/watch in class. Then we relate it to what they’re studying in a large group discussion. For example, during the summer of 2020, in my Integrated Marketing Communications course, I had them read an article about how Covid-19 affected marketing. Then we watched some examples of tv ads and discussed the differences in those to what we were seeing before the pandemic.

The Human Factor:

Since we are currently (January 2021) almost all online and not by choice, I’ve found that the human factor makes a difference.

- I’ve started logging into class a few minutes early, with my camera on, and chatting with students.
- I usually start class by simply asking how they’re doing.
- I started opening my Tuesday class sessions with my own version of Travel Tuesday. I put up a Zoom background of a different country I’ve been to and see if the students can guess where I am.