

Professor Corner

July Professor: Jeffrey Boles, Associate Professor

Department: Legal Studies



Jeffrey Boles – Online Teaching Tools & Strategies

- Inclusive Teaching
- Application Cards
- Class Participation in Large Online Section Courses
- Rubrics
- Student-Generated Test Questions

Inclusive Teaching

In terms of inclusive teaching strategies, I try to be aware of biases or associations that I may have and that exist in my field, and with that perspective, I review the materials used in my online courses and ask myself if I over-represent one group in readings, examples, illustrations, etc. Then make modifications where appropriate.

Application Cards

I am a big fan of application cards, where, after students have learned an important principle, theory or procedure, I ask them to write down at least one possible, real-world application for what they have just learned. These applications will later be discussed as part of their breakout group activities, as this technique helps students see the relevance of what they are learning.

Class Participation in Large Online Section Courses

For my large section online undergraduate courses, I use the Zoom Poll feature to generate a ten-question multiple choice and true/false poll/quiz for most class sessions that meets multiple efficiency objectives. First it serves as a class participation metric (where I relay to students that completing the quiz, graded simply on a complete/not complete basis, will count as their participation for that session). For each quiz, Zoom allows me to download into an Excel file the names of the students who complete the quiz and their quiz responses, and I can calibrate cumulative participation for the semester based upon the data provided.

Second, the quiz functions as a content review for students, as I draft all of the quiz questions based upon material covered in the prior class session. During class, I provide about 4-5 minutes for students to complete the quiz, and then I spend another 5 minutes sharing the quiz results with students and identifying the correct answers. As the “Share Results” Zoom Poll feature allows everyone to see the relative percentage of students who responded to each possible answer choice, the shared results help me identify which concepts or applications students may be struggling with, and I can devote more attention to those areas when reviewing the results. If students would like further explanation or clarification for any question presented, they simply raise their hand via the Zoom Chat feature, and we discuss.

Third, the quiz serves as a “practice workout” for students as they approach the course exams. I explain to students that the quiz questions will approximate the types of questions students will encounter on the course exams, with varying levels of difficulty, and that while the quizzes are low stakes (graded on a complete/not complete basis), it is in the students’ best interests to take these quiz exercises seriously. The exercises reduce testing anxiety levels and raise student comfort levels and confidence.

Finally, in any given class session, I vary the point at which we take the Zoom quiz – sometimes 15 minutes into the class session, sometimes in the middle, and sometimes at the end of class. Implementing the quiz at seemingly unpredictable times, rather than consistently at the start of the class session, deters students from exiting class immediately after taking the quiz.

Rubrics

I use Canvas rubrics for all graded assessments in all online courses I teach, and I have found that rubrics encourage students to be reflective, to reach higher standards, and to target areas that need improvement; improve student work product; and help me think deeply about my own expectations and goals for my students and grade more efficiently.

When drafting rubrics, I ask myself the following questions:

- What is the course goal/learning outcome this assignment addresses?
- What are the observable criteria that would tell me (and my students) the extent to which they have achieved the goal/outcome and are moving toward competency?
- At what distinct levels might students perform?
- How can I describe the levels at which each criterion might be met?

Student-Generated Test Questions

I am also a big fan of having students draft anticipated test questions as part of their exam preparation. This technique allows me to assess what my students consider to be the most important content, what they understand as useful test questions, and how well they understand the material, and it allows students to practice organizing, synthesizing and analyzing large amounts of information in order to prepare for exams.