# Online Teaching & Learning Collaborative (O-TLC)

## Easy Early Online Engagement Activities for Student & Faculty Success

### Set a Welcoming Tone

Effective online teaching requires the faculty to be a participant in the classroom, rather simply monitoring for compliance. As with your students, the more you put into your course, the better the overall outcome will be for both you and your students.

### Welcome Videos & Introductions – Kirstie Kemmerer (GSC Faculty)

I try to connect with students in two ways at the beginning of an online course.  First, I provide an introduction video of myself. Usually, I record this video/screencast once a year or so. I make it relatively generic, and don't use specific phrases like "this spring semester."  Instead, I might just say, "in the coming weeks," so that I can save time for myself and re-use the introductory video for a least a few semesters.

The other way I try to connect with students is providing an introductory forum.  This forum is adapted to fit the current course, and it usually asks students to discuss some basic information and then something unique about themselves.  In order to connect with each student individually, I make sure to give a detailed response to every single introduction post, and this sets the tone for the course. It lets students know that I am an attentive instructor that cares about creating an academic connection with each student.

Together, these attempts at early engagement allow for students to feel welcome and acknowledged.  It shows that peer-to-peer and peer-to-professor engagement are important components that are highly valued in my online courses. I also believe that these introductory strategies show that being "present" and available for all of my students is important to me and the success of the online course being taught. Learners feel secure if they know their professors are engaged and present. Availability and engagement are crucial to student success.

**Sample Introductions Forum**
- For the introductory forum in my Research Methods course (this would be tweaked based on the course being taught):

  *Welcome to our class!  Use this space to introduce yourself to the class.  Please share with us the following:*

  - *Your name and where you live*
  - *Your major/degree program*

*- General topics that might be of interest to you for a research project (it's fine to just talk in broad ideas at this point - can be of personal or professional interest)*
*- Feel free to tell us anything else that makes you YOU - hobbies, favorite colors, what you do when you're not studying...*

## Four Easy Early Engagement Ideas – Lyndele von Schill (GSC Faculty & Alum)

As an adult learner who received my degree entirely through online learning, I appreciate the many challenges that adult learners face in managing conflicting life demands. I want students to know, from the beginning of the course, that their success is important, and that I will do what it takes to help them succeed. I do four things designed to connect with students, and to provide a welcoming space that invites active engagement and communication:

1. My Teaching Philosophy, in the Course Syllabus, makes it clear that I am motivated by a desire for student success, and am open to conversations about how to make this success likely.

   *Learning should be an enjoyable journey, where evidence of understanding is a natural outcome of the learning experience. In other words, my hope is that you will find the information presented in this course interesting, inspiring, and important to your personal and academic journey. I use a combination of written, visual, and verbal media to share information and evaluate understanding, and encourage you to let me know if we should discuss learning styles that work best for you.*

2. A Welcome Announcement that includes a clear message that: (a) each student's success is a priority, (b) I am open to using multiple types of resources to facilitate that success, (c) I am open to emails, phone calls, and/or Zoom sessions (on the student's schedule) for one-on-one conversations, and (d) I value their knowledge as 'co-teachers.'

   *Hi, everyone!*

   *I am very much looking forward to working with you, and getting to know you, over the next 10 weeks. This course is intended to be a learning experience; I also hope that you will be inspired by what you learn, and feel prepared to teach others about what you learn.*

   *Please let me know what you need to succeed as we go through the modules. I have tried to offer a variety of formats (written, visual, etc.) to help make the material accessible. If you would benefit from some other communication method, please tell me. I am happy to meet with you via Zoom if you would like to discuss anything in more detail.*

   *I encourage you to follow your interests by researching (preferably through peer-reviewed sources) topics that you would like to learn more about - and use the [General Course Questions and Discussion forum](#) to teach the rest of us!*

   *I am here for you.*

3. The first week's Discussion assignment is designed to create a 'safe space' where students can share, as they feel comfortable, information about themselves that will (a) help me understand their motivations for taking the course and their location, and (b) create an environment that encourages collaboration and mutual support. I participate in the assignment by submitting a Discussion post to provide a model and to share something about myself and my motivations for teaching and for learning from the students.

   *Please let us know something about yourself: What name and pronouns do you use (e.g., I go by Taylor, and I use they/them pronouns)? Are you in NH? Participating online from somewhere else?*

   *What drew you to this course? What are you hoping to learn, and what would you like to take away from this course?*

4. My "Instructor Availability" section makes it clear that I expect to be responsive, and that I will meet with learners on their schedules.

   *Email is a great way to contact me. I can be reached at l.vonschill@.*
   *I should respond within 24 hours, if not sooner. If you would like to chat, via phone or Zoom, please send me an email with the days/times that work best for you.*

These early efforts at student engagement support teaching practice by making sure that the students know that (a) I am not only available, but eager to engage and be supportive, (b) I intend to use a variety of methods to share information, and (c) their situations (location, work obligations, etc.) are acknowledged and that I am willing to work with the student to ensure success.

In a more broad sense, my early engagement/connection strategy includes letting the learners know that their success is important to me, and that I will do whatever I can to help facilitate that success. I hope that offering multiple ways to engage with me, and multiple ways to complete and submit assignments, allows the student to approach the learning with a sense of security about the likelihood of their success in the course.

I also try to model what I am asking for from the students (e.g., in the first Forum post assignment, I respond to the assignment in a way that provides a model for the students, and also gives the students a more personal instruction to me.

## Engaging Introduction Forums – Michael Ammons (GSC Faculty & Alum)

I connect with students by creating an Introduction Video where I share information about my work history, teaching experience, family background, hobbies, and a general overview of the course. Additionally, I provide important deadlines associated with the first week of class such as completing an "Attendance/Participation Forum" within the first two days of the course to help foster student engagement.  I also supplement the video with an "Introduction Forum" where students are encouraged to post information about their work history, major, online experience, hobbies and students get the opportunity "to meet" their classmates and respond to their posts.

These introduction and welcome activities help to engage students early in the beginning stages of the course, establishing a positive learning environment in which the professor and the students are "present" and "active."  Being present and accessible help students to overcome some of the anxieties associated with distance education. Also, it helps to establish the communication expectations for the course where students are encouraged to contact the professor regarding questions with the understanding that timely responses will be provided (within 24 hours). Additionally, within the discussion forums, frequent and timely responses from the students and professor provides a broader perspective on the key topics.

**Sample Prompt & My Own Entry to Model Expectations**

Prompt

*For the Introduction Forum in my online course:*
*Please introduce yourself to your classmates.*
*You can include the following:*
- *Where you live*
- *Hobbies*
- *Work history*
- *Future goals*
- *Academic Major*
- *Family*
- *What you hope to learn from class*
- *Online learning experience*
- *Interesting facts about yourself*

*Create a YouTube account, upload an Introduction video, share the link with your classmates and professor.  (Optional)*
*Include the following:*
- *Your name*
- *Major*
- *What you hope to learn in this class?*
- *Optional (Work experience)*
- *Optional (Hobbies, interests)*

Modeling a Response for Students

> *Hi Class,*
>
> *Welcome to this course!*
>
> *Before we begin I want to share a little about my background. I have been teaching since 2009, having earned an MBA in Business Administration, Ed.S. in Educational Leadership, and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Administration from Liberty University. I have*

*taught several courses in business, management, and leadership at the graduate and undergraduate level. Over the last twelve years, I have held leadership positions within the Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina Community College System, liberal arts colleges, technical schools, and faith-based universities. I served in the United States Air Force as a Morse Systems Operator for the Signals Intelligence Squadron. During my enlistment, I worked at the National Security Agency and the American-Japanese Joint Task Force. I look forward to the next 12 weeks as we dive into the various topics related to this course.*

*On a personal note, I have been married for 22 years and my wife and I have a 14 year-old daughter who is currently in the 8th grade. A few of my hobbies include fishing, exercising, reading, and experimenting with different dining experiences. Since I am seldom at home during the week given my work responsibilities and travel, I enjoy hanging out with my family and friends on the weekends where I can be found at cookouts, watching Lifetime movies with my girls (fun, fun), or reclining back in my Man Cave watching the Dallas Cowboys play football.*

*Here is some additional information:*

> **Last movie I watched:** *Hobbs and Shaw*
> **Last place I visited:** *Myrtle Beach, South Carolina*
> **Currently watching:** *Dr. Pimple Popper, Ink Master, Greenleaf*
> **Currently listening to:** *Kenny Chesney, David Bowie, Public Enemy, Kiss, Meatloaf, Prince, Chris Stapleton, Bob Marley*
> **Foreign countries I have visited:** *England, Japan, and Korea*
> **Interesting fact:** *I am a registered member of the [Coharie Tribe](), which is 1 of the 8 recognized Native American tribes within the state of North Carolina.*
>
> *Please review the syllabus for all course requirements. After reading the syllabus, please go to the Introduction Forum and introduce yourself to classmates and post your Introduction Video (Optional). Feel free to share and reply to your classmates.*