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A Teaching Roundtable

On Teaching IR amid COVID-19

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Roundtable Editor: Diane Labrosse | Commissioning Editor: Andrew Szarejko | Production Editor: George Fujii

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INTRODUCTION BY MEGAN BECKER, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

A Semester Interrupted

In our universities, we are tasked with cultivating the next generation of informed and engaged citizens. This can be a challenge in the best of circumstances, but with the backdrop of COVID-19, many of those challenges are amplified. We are in the midst of a global pandemic. We are all concerned about our health, financial circumstances, and overall well-being, as well as that of our loved ones. These concerns are not specific to any single group, though some may feel their effects more than others. Faculty and students and, by extension, the life of the university, are expected to carry on.

I was last on campus on March 11th, 2020. My institution, the University of Southern California, had just announced a ‘test-run’ for remote learning to give faculty some practice using video-conferencing software. It was a few days before spring break, with the university acknowledging the possibility that students would not be returning to campus (they did not). From my campus office, I lectured on research ethics to a large introductory class, making awkward attempts at engagement using chat boxes and online polls. I discussed the opportunities for international cooperation around COVID-19 with students in a course on the United Nations, their faces situated in a grid on my laptop screen. This was certainly not the same experience as my usual face-to-face classes.¹

Essayists Nicole Wegner and Laura J. Shepherd note that “This is not online education, this is education in an emergency.”—a now-familiar mantra repeated amongst my friends and colleagues.² When well-planned and executed, online education is just as effective as face-to-face instruction. This was not the world that many of my colleagues and I were living in. None of us had taught online before, nor had we received much training, beyond some university-produced videos on how to use the Zoom video-conferencing platform, nor did we have much time to make the transition to remote delivery of our courses. We scrambled to adjust our approaches to and expectations for learning.³ We monitored #COVIDcampus on Twitter⁴ and exchanged articles on asynchronous versus synchronous delivery of material⁵ and supporting the mental health of both ourselves and our students.⁶ Like many of us in this moment, in many areas of our lives, we made do.

¹ Beyond the obvious differences, one of the factors that has driven dissatisfaction with the transition to synchronous online lectures is ‘Zoom fatigue.’ For an explanation of some of the psychology behind this phenomenon, see Jeremy Bailenson, “Why Zoom Meetings Can Exhaust Us,” *Wall Street Journal*, 3 April 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-zoom-meetings-can-exhaust-us-11585953336>.

² See also, Charles Hodges, Stephanie Moore, Barb Lockee, Torrey Trust, and Aaron Bond, “The Different Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning,” *Educause Review* (blog), 27 March 2020, <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>.

³ Rebecca Barrett-Fox, “Please Do a Bad Job of Putting Your Courses Online,” *Any Good Thing* (blog), 12 March 2020, <https://anygoodthing.com/2020/03/12/please-do-a-bad-job-of-putting-your-courses-online/>.

⁴ To find all tweets using this hashtag, see here: <https://twitter.com/search?q=COVIDcampus>.

⁵ Daniel Stanford, “Videoconferencing Alternatives: How Low Bandwidth Teaching Will Save Us All,” *Iddblog* (blog), *Center for Teaching and Learning at DePaul University*, 16 March 2020, <https://www.iddblog.org/videoconferencing-alternatives-how-low-bandwidth-teaching-will-save-us-all/>.

⁶ Jessica Calarco, “Adjusting Expectations for Empathy and Equity in the Wake of COVID-19,” *Scatterplot* (blog), 12 April 2020, <https://scatter.wordpress.com/2020/04/12/adjusting-expectations-for-empathy-and-equity-in-the-wake-of-covid-19/>.

What Next?

Now that the regular school year has wrapped up, many questions remain regarding university education will look like in the new semester, particularly at residential colleges. Is there sufficient infrastructure and policy in place to support the safe return of students to campus?⁷ Will face-to-face classes resume, will we continue with online teaching, or both?⁸ What will we do in the case of a second wave?⁹ In the United States, in particular, the answers to these questions given by university administrators are driven just as much by concerns regarding the financial viability of these institutions and, for many public institutions, politics, as they are by concerns for the education and health of our communities.¹⁰

This may be a moment of reckoning, a chance for us to acknowledge the ways in which both we, as educators, and our institutions have been failing to fulfill our organizational mission and to act in ways that benefit all of our students. To focus on the role of individual faculty members: We must consider that learners face individual challenges that may hinder their success in our courses, that our approaches to content and assessment may not be accessible or inclusive, and that we need to put greater effort into contextualizing current events in a meaningful way. While each of these considerations was just as important in 2019, the last few months have brought our deficiencies into greater relief. Now is our opportunity to move beyond education in an emergency.

Each piece in this symposium is meant to help us make sense of our new educational environment and identify areas for change in our pedagogy, both large and small. They share some common threads. While coming from different countries and different institutional contexts, the authors, Yehonatan Abramson, Alise Coen, and Wegner and Shepherd, all provide perspectives on the specific types of challenges students and faculty face in operating outside the traditional classroom space, on principles that we can use to guide changes to our pedagogical approaches moving forward, and on concrete ways that we can implement those changes in our courses.

Changes in Circumstances

One of the themes highlighted by multiple authors in this forum is the vulnerability of the participants in our remote learning experiment. While the classroom provides a public space for meaningful dialogue, remote learning brings that engagement into our private spaces.¹¹ With the synchronous video-conferencing that is being encouraged by many institutions because it most closely mimics the classroom, we see into each other's homes. This may be uncomfortable or even threatening for students and faculty, and pose a serious limitation on the conversations we can have and the engagement we might foster.

We also face more practical challenges, as students and faculty may lack access to the necessary technology (computers, high-speed internet) to participate, the quiet needed to do their work, and the time to complete that work when they are facing

⁷ "The Great Reopening Debate" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Great-Reopening-Debate/249014>.

⁸ Educause Learning Initiative, "Seven Things You Should Know About the Hyflex Model," *Educause* (blog), 9 November 2010, <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2010/11/7-things-you-should-know-about-the-hyflex-course-model>.

⁹ Shawn Hubler, "College Calendars in the Pandemic: No Fall Break and Home by Thanksgiving," *New York Times*, 19 May 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/us/coronavirus-college-fall-semester.html>.

¹⁰ Katherine Paxson, "College Campuses Must Re-Open in the Fall. Here's how we do it." *New York Times*, 26 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/26/opinion/coronavirus-colleges-universities.html>.

¹¹ The piece by Wegner and Shepherd provides a useful lens for thinking about issues of privacy and engagement.

other demands, such as caregiving responsibilities.¹² These practical challenges are only compounded by the fact that members of marginalized groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. While higher education in the U.S. has been lauded as a driver of social mobility, COVID-19 has made racial and class divides more apparent.¹³ Without access to support services on campus, many students are left to do without the things they need to learn and thrive.

Changes in Pedagogy

Addressing these vulnerabilities in a meaningful fashion will require widespread action and advocacy in our institutions and in our governments. Cognizant of how this type of activity will take time and coordinated effort,¹⁴ what can we do to address these challenges in our (largely virtual) courses in the meantime? The authors in the forum suggest a few guiding principles: sensitivity, compassion, feasibility, and flexibility. It is important to note that these are not just principles to guide our interactions with students, but also with ourselves.

First, we must be sensitive to the new reality that all of us are living. And that the reality of one day may be upended in the next. We must seek to understand our students' circumstances and unique challenges and have the self-awareness to understand how our own context is affecting our work in the classroom. We must assume that we do not always know the whole story.

Sensitivity in practice includes seeking out information about our students that will help us better serve them during this time. We can review college-level statistics on the proportions of students that are local, whether they hold full-time jobs, their socio-economic backgrounds, etc. in order better understand the general population. We can survey the students in our courses and ask them about their circumstances.¹⁵

Sensitivity yields recognition of each individual's circumstances, but then we must act with compassion. We must recognize our common humanity and take actions that are constructive rather than punitive. We can create space for students to let us know if they're struggling and show understanding when they tell us their needs. We can make check-ins a regular part of our courses, whether during synchronous sessions, office hours, or one of the web platforms that we regularly use.¹⁶

While sensitivity and compassion can guide our approach, our response also needs to reflect relevant resource constraints—both our students' and our own. Feasibility should be an important consideration in the design of our courses. Abramson

¹² These challenges should come as no surprise. A recent survey of 167,000 US college students found that 39% were food-insecure during the previous 30 days and 46% were housing-insecure during the previous year. See Baker-Smith, Christine, Vanessa Coca, Sara Goldrick-Rab, Elizabeth Looker, Brianna Richardson, and Tiffani Williams, “#RealCollege 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Campus Basic Needs Insecurity,” 1 February 2020.

¹³ Nicholas Casey, “College Made Them Feel Equal. The Virus Exposed How Unequal Their Lives Are,” *New York Times*, 4 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/04/us/politics/coronavirus-zoom-college-classes.html>.

¹⁴ This is not to say that organizing amongst faculty to push for appropriate and equitable policies at their university or within the government is not a valuable endeavor, but rather to highlight the impact we can have in our interactions with our students. The topic of institutional adaptation during the pandemic could easily constitute its own forum.

¹⁵ It is helpful to ask about access to a computer/internet/private space, any caregiving or work responsibilities, and comfort with keeping their cameras on during synchronous sessions, among other topics. Faculty should also carefully consider whether they want students to submit surveys with their names (easier for follow-up) vs. anonymous responses (to preserve students' privacy).

¹⁶ Your universities learning management system may provide an appropriate place for this type of communication. I've also used Slack with success.

astutely notes the best choices that we make in our courses may be those that are “*doable*, not *optimal*.” There is a learning curve in teaching remotely and, even though most of us have had more time to prepare for this new modality than during spring’s interrupted term, that does not mean that we can or should try to change everything at once. Sometimes small actions, with fewer bells-and-whistles can have a great impact. For example, with students potentially spread across time zones or lacking the time, technology, or attention to spend on Zoom all day, asynchronous work is likely to work best for the largest number of students.

Related to the idea of feasibility, reacting to the inevitable changes in circumstances caused by the pandemic will also require flexibility. While some faculty may have found a certain level of strictness helpful in managing student engagement and performance in pre-COVID times, those strategies can have unnecessarily negative effects on students now. Wegner and Shepherd offer some excellent suggestions in this regard, highlighting the principles of Universal Design for Learning and how allowing for multiple modes of access to and engagement with course material can enrich students’ experiences. And Coen cites Dayal and Musgrave’s¹⁷ concept of “responsible uncertainty,” noting how a flexible approach in our pedagogical practice is not just about course policies, but also modeling how we deal with our own intellectual uncertainty when trying to understand a new phenomenon.

Changes in Content

As scholars with deep interests in the international arena, our expertise can help students better understand how COVID-19 is affecting societies across the globe and many of our course topics have direct connections to the issues we face today. It is unlikely that we teach a course where no connection can be made given that we teach on subjects like the histories and characteristics of pandemics, international public health, international cooperation to address transnational challenges, and how policymakers think about new and emerging threats. We cannot ignore the elephant in the room. Instead, we can highlight how our course topics and general areas of study can help students better understand current events.¹⁸

Coen suggests going beyond updated course content. How can we integrate self-reflection into course assignments, asking students to think about the impact that recent events have had on them and how they have exposed ‘layered vulnerabilities’ both at home and abroad? Giving students that space can make their work in our courses feel more relevant and create connections that would not otherwise have been made. It can capture the reality that international events have local effects.

Moving Forward

As we stare down the beginning of a new term, we would all do well to take moment to reflect upon our teaching and how we can update our strategies to meet the new challenges we face in a way that is sensitive, compassionate, feasible, and flexible. Our work as academics is to gather information, analyze it, and share our hard-won knowledge with others. That is what we do in our scholarship; it is what we do in our teaching. This forum is an opportunity to share pedagogical knowledge and generate ideas for moving forward during uncertain times.¹⁹ The essays can serve as a starting point for or an

¹⁷ Anjali Kaushlesh Dayal and Paul Musgrave, “Teaching Counterfactuals from Hell,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 30:1 (2018): 23-31.

¹⁸ There is a balance to be struck here. In my own spring courses, I regularly used examples related the pandemic. During a check-in survey with my students, several noted that they wanted fewer current events, as they were in a state of ‘COVID information overload.’ This may become less relevant as time passes and people’s media consumption habits change, but it is worth keeping in mind.

¹⁹ Many professional associations have repositories of teaching materials and have made recent updates to them incorporating information on remote learning and teaching topics related to COVID-19. See materials from the American Political Science Association, <https://educate.apsanet.org>; the International Studies Association <https://www.isanet.org/Professional->

addition to conversations about teaching amongst our colleagues. While our courses this fall will not be back to ‘normal,’ we can build on the knowledge we have gained to better meet the needs of our students and communities.

Participants:

Megan Becker is an Assistant (Teaching) Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California. In addition to teaching courses in international security, she works extensively with students in the Security Political Economy Lab (uscspec.org) and as the Principal Investigator of the National Science Foundation Research Experiences for Undergraduates Program “Data Science and the Political Economy of International Security.” Her pedagogy research focuses on undergraduate research, mentorship, and methods education and has been published in *PS: Political Science and Politics* and the *Journal of Political Science Education*.

Yehonatan Abramson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He holds a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD. His research interests include International Relations Theory, nationalism and religion, migration and diaspora politics, and critical security studies. Abramson’s research has been published in peer-reviewed journals, such as the *European Journal of International Relations*, *Political Geography*, and the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

Alise Coen is Associate Professor of Political Science at University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Her research interests include refugees, migration, human rights norms, identity, and U.S. foreign policy. Her work has appeared in *International Relations*, *Ethics & International Affairs*, *Politics & Religion*, and *The International Journal of Human Rights*. She is currently working on a book project about U.S. refugee responsibility-sharing. Her Twitter handle is [@alise_coen](https://twitter.com/alise_coen).

Laura J. Shepherd is an Australian Research Council Future Fellow and Professor of International Relations at the University of Sydney, Australia. Her primary research focuses on the United Nations Security Council’s ‘Women, Peace and Security’ agenda and she has written extensively on the formulation of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent Women, Peace and Security resolutions. Laura is particularly interested in gender, security and violence, and she has strong interests in pedagogy and popular culture. She tweets from [@drljshepherd](https://twitter.com/drljshepherd).

Nicole Wegner is a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney, Australia. Her primary research focuses on gender, war, and militarization. She has published research on militarist myths related to international peacekeeping and is currently working on a collaborative project assessing veteran suicides in NATO militaries. Her Twitter handle is [@nlwegner](https://twitter.com/nlwegner).

[Resources/Teaching](#); and the American Historical Association, <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians>.

Reflecting on my process of adaptation to teaching IR courses during the coronavirus crisis is a slightly frustrating endeavor due to two main reasons. First, such reflection emphasizes the anxious and uncertain conditions under which the adaptation took place: I needed to make quick and abrupt decisions under conditions of uncertainty, with very little information, and without prior experience in online teaching. Second, at the point of writing, any reflection process feels incomplete, as the semester in Israeli universities is still ongoing, and I do not as of yet have feedback on the perspective of the students.

Still, in this essay, I would like to offer a preliminary reflection on my teaching choices in the two courses I teach at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: an undergraduate elective course on *Critical Approaches to Security Studies* (about 40 students, equivalent to a US 300-level course) and an undergraduate seminar on *Diaspora in World Politics* (about 20 students, equivalent to a US 400-level course). Specifically, I discuss my decision-making process along three axes of change—technological, pedagogical, and substantive—paying particular attention to the context in which my decisions were made. This, I think, is an important caveat that I would like to stress: while I hope that my own experience can help enrich our discussion regarding teaching IR during the coronavirus crisis, my reflections are highly context-dependent.

In my case, the timing of the crisis (just before a new semester began), the content and size of my courses, and a highly diverse student body with different physical and emotional challenges have shaped the principles I followed in adapting to what became the new normal. In hindsight, three primary principles guided my decision-making process:

- (1) Flexibility—I was trying to make decisions that were reversible without much interruption to the course but that also allowed the students some flexibility in their schedule.
- (2) Sensitivity—during the process, I wanted to make sure to consider the possible needs and challenges faced by a highly diverse student body as well as my own difficulties during this time.
- (3) Feasibility—following a quick but overwhelming experience with a plethora of online teaching options and tools, I decided to focus on teaching choices that are *doable* rather than necessarily optimal.

These are interwoven across all three axes of change, to which I now turn.

Technology

In contrast to many schools in the United States, the coronavirus crisis caught faculty members in Israeli universities just as the Spring semester was starting. Thus, rather than changing our mode of teaching in the middle of a semester, we had about a week to prepare and adjust our courses for a full online semester. This timing allowed my institution to quickly organize faculty workshops on operating various technological tools as well as to circulate resources on online pedagogy. On the technological front, two main decisions needed to be made. The first one was whether to teach asynchronous (pre-recorded lectures), synchronous (live lectures), or some combination of the two (such as pre-recorded lectures and live discussions). The second was which online platform I would use (Zoom, Panopto, pre-recorded Powerpoint presentations, etc.).

Experimentation and consultation with peers were critical in the decision-making process. First, during the week before the semester started, I was trying to “play” with all possible platforms to check which one would allow myself and my students more flexibility. Second, I was considering the multiple challenges faced by the diverse student body at the Hebrew University: some do not have internet access, some take care of a family; some lost their jobs; some are distracted by the crisis; some are stuck abroad. Third, the narrow time window meant that my technological choice needs to be feasible and doable, both in terms of my expectations for myself and my students.

The eventual decision—to teach synchronously and record all lectures—allowed me to balance these considerations. Students were able to join the online lecture but also to listen to it later. Meeting the students during the online sessions also allowed me to assess their situation, listen to their emotional needs, and follow up with those who do not attend. Finally, the choice to teach synchronously was also a matter of personal disposition and style, something I learned through the process of experimenting with pre-recorded lectures. This was also more practical in terms of my own time: when I was experimenting with pre-recorded lectures, I constantly stopped and restarted the recording whenever I felt something is not “perfect.” While pre-recorded lectures could have been used me over the next few years, the hope at that time (early March 2020) was that we would resume teaching face-to-face relatively soon.

Pedagogy

The realization that we needed to shift our courses to an online setting triggered a process of reflection on pedagogical strategies: How should I change my teaching technique? Should I change the assignments? If so, how? How could I trigger discussion without face-to-face interaction? After contemplation and consultation with online sources and peers, I decided that ‘less is more’—if I were to implement changes, I should do only minor ones but do them well. Also here, what guided me was my desire to make choices that were sensitive and feasible but that also allowed flexibility, particularly in terms of schedule.

Therefore, I have only slightly adjusted my pedagogical strategies. First, I divided my lectures into smaller 15-20 minutes sections. Second, I included “teaser” questions at the beginning or end of each section. Third, I incorporated additional tools (such as Kahoot!) to break the format of lectures and discussion. These changes did not require much time but had the potential to improve the concentration and engagement of the students with the material.

Additionally, I adapted the assignments required for the course. I removed the part of the grade that is related to attendance and participation, knowing that the circumstances as well as the online environment might make it harder for some students to fulfill this requirement. While the language on the syllabus encourages attendance and participation, I did not want to penalize those students who could not attend the synchronous lecture or those who did not have stable access to an internet connection.

I also replaced the take-home mid-term exam with smaller assignments throughout the semester, requiring students to write a report on three reading assignments of their choosing (but from different weeks on the syllabus). While a take-home exam could still take place when one is teaching online, the rationale behind this change was to allow the students some flexibility during the semester but to increase their direct engagement with the material. I still do not have the evaluations of the students regarding the course, so it might be too early to assess whether this was a better decision from their perspective.

Substance

The next broad question was whether and how to incorporate the pandemic into my existing courses. For me, the answer was clear from the beginning—I did not want to teach IR in a way that is disconnected from the unfolding global events. I strove to use IR insights and conceptual tools to make space for thinking and understanding different processes and responses that are related to the pandemic.

One of my courses—*Critical Approaches to Security Studies*—already includes materials that speak directly to issues of global health and pandemics. Therefore, I quickly compiled an additional reading list to provide those who are interested with reading materials as well as to open a conversation on issues not discussed in the Israeli media, such as pandemics and inequality, pandemics and migration, or pandemics and scientific expertise.¹ For instance, when teaching securitization, we

¹ Dr. Yehonatan Abramson, “[IR and Pandemics–Reading Resources](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1khed9xJd0U4fSFqSnAyt8CKqTKM_kMOZ/view).” Prepared for the course *Critical Approaches to Security Studies*, 14 March 2020, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1khed9xJd0U4fSFqSnAyt8CKqTKM_kMOZ/view.

discussed the Israeli Prime Minister's speeches regarding the 'body politic' and the construction of the virus as an enemy to it. When focusing on post-colonial approaches, we discussed international hierarchies, access to health, and the uneven construction of 'health risks.'

My other class—*Diaspora in World Politics*—is less related to the coronavirus crisis and indeed, I did not change the topics of the syllabus nor its readings. Instead, I initiated three conversations that connected the pandemic with the material. The first one was a discussion of the pandemic and refugees (that by some definitions could constitute diaspora), the second considered the 'duty of care' that states presumably have vis-à-vis their citizens abroad,² and the third one involved possible changes in transnational engagement, especially in the relationship between Israel and its Jewish diaspora.

In other words, the richness of IR provided me with much flexibility to recalibrate the content of my courses but in a feasible way that did not require me to transform entire lectures. So far, from my assessment of the students' reactions, they seem to be very much engaged when discussing 'coronavirus' affairs. They often bring additional examples from their knowledge or experience with the pandemic.

Conclusion

The question of how to 'best' adapt one's teaching in IR during the coronavirus crisis cannot be answered without paying attention to our particular context. Thus, my experience and decisions were very much shaped by the timing of the crisis, the diverse student body, the topics of my courses, and my personal style as an instructor. I do hope, however, that the principles of flexibility, sensitivity, and feasibility can travel well across different contexts.

If I am pushed to think of broad lessons I learned during my adaptation process, I cannot help but wonder whether these are corona-specific or whether the crisis just clarified some lessons that should also guide us during routine times. In any case, my own lessons are summarized below:

1) Sometimes 'less is more': The principle of feasibility cuts across the three issues mentioned above—technology, pedagogy, and substance. During a rapid, uncertain, and evolving crisis, our expectations for ourselves and our students should responsibly focus on providing a *viable* learning experience rather than an optimal one. Introducing a minor change but implementing it well might facilitate a better learning experience than trying to achieve too much.

2) Diversity: While using only one online platform (Zoom), I found it useful to use multiple tools to enable students to access the material via different paths. These include but not limited to synchronous lectures, short reading reports, 'breakout' rooms, and polls as discussion triggers. Another example of engagement is the one offered by Professor Brent Steele, who asked the students in his Intro to IR to reflect on International Relations in the context of the pandemic.³

Diversity is also related to the substance of IR, as various courses and topics have different 'hooks' to relate to the coronavirus crisis. Some could focus on cooperation and discord in the context of states or in the context of international institutions, such as the WHO. Others could focus on hegemonic transitions or perceptions of hegemonic leadership, especially in light of the Chinese and American responses to the virus. Those who teach International Political Economy

² Nina Graeger and Halvard Leira, eds., *The Duty of Care in International Relations: Protecting Citizens Beyond the Border* (London: Routledge, 2020).

³ Brent J. Steele, Twitter post, 17 April 2020, 8:21 a.m., <https://twitter.com/BrentJSteele1/status/1251168896586878981?s=20>.

could talk about the possible implications of COVID-19 on global trade or global inequality. Those who teach international law also have multiple avenues of discussion, as highlighted in a recent symposium.⁴

3) Community. The transition to online teaching and my reflections on how to adapt my courses have relied heavily on my peers at the Hebrew University as well as the broader community of IR scholars. Notwithstanding the emotional support provided by a community, I emphasize here the professional benefits of the community as a source for consultation, knowledge exchange, and experience-based advice. For instance, some scholars shared their “global health” syllabi or asking for reading suggestions on the topic.⁵ Others have shared their material or ideas regarding how they would teach IR issues in light of COVID-19.⁶

But having a community is also important for our students. By meeting them online once or several times a week, we are allowing them to listen, talk, think, and maybe have some distraction from the disruption of COVID-19. These online sessions help us as much as they help the students—they make us get out of our pajamas, put on a nice shirt, and mobilize positive energies in order to teach.

⁴ Barrie Sander and Jason Rudall, “Symposium on COVID-19 and International Law: Introduction,” *pinio Juris*, 30 March 2020, <http://opiniojuris.org/2020/03/30/symposium-on-covid-19-and-international-law-introduction/>.

⁵ For instance, Josh Busby, Twitter post, 15 March 2020, 12:47 p.m., <https://twitter.com/busbyj2/status/1239281459900399616?s=20> and Seva Gunitsky, Twitter post, 2 May 2020, 11:46 a.m., <https://twitter.com/SevaUT/status/1256656251460694018?s=20>.

⁶ For instance, Erin Lockwood, Twitter post, 16 March 2020, 1:39 p.m. in reply to Nathan Jensen, 16 March 2020, 1:18 p.m., <https://twitter.com/erinkaylockwood/status/1239652653396668419?s=20>; Clare Wenham, Twitter post, 5 March 2020, 4:42 a.m., <https://twitter.com/clarewenham/status/1235546249681657857?s=20>; Paul Poast, Twitter post, 29 February 2020, 4:17 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ProfPaulPoast/status/1233727889004285952?s=20>; Tanisha Fazal, Twitter post, 10 March 2020, 1:23 p.m., <https://twitter.com/tanishafazal/status/1237474088047828998?s=20>; Paul Poast, Twitter post, 11 April 2020, 7:27 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ProfPaulPoast/status/1248981050619056128?s=20>; Paul Poast, Twitter post, 26 March 2020, 6:47 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ProfPaulPoast/status/1243172840272265219?s=20>.

 ESSAY BY ALISE COEN, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-GREEN BAY

In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 was cast as “the great equalizer”—an impartial disease that “does not see race, religion, color, caste, creed, language or borders before striking.”¹ UN Secretary-General António Guterres described COVID-19 as “above all a human crisis.”² While such descriptions offered a premise of parity, they missed the disproportionately devastating effects of the virus on individuals who “live with intersectional social locations, such as race, indigeneity, age, (dis)ability, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, refugee status, class and religion.”³ Teaching International Relations (IR) amid COVID-19 reiterates the disparate effects of pandemics in terms of both asymmetrical impacts among students as well as compounded layers of vulnerability in global politics. As governments and universities face uncertain scenarios in choreographing their reopening, COVID-19 also foregrounds the inevitably messy but important task of grappling with unknowability. This essay advances three pandemic pedagogy motifs: (1) being attentive to how our students’ lives are impacted in uneven ways by the pandemic; (2) using the pandemic as a lens for scrutinizing themes of layered vulnerability in global politics; and (3) confronting the inherent unknowability that animates both global politics and teaching amid a pandemic.

1. Student Worlds

More than “indoctrination into the arcane debates of scholarly specialists,” students of international studies need “conceptual tools...to make sense of the world they inhabit.”⁴ In pursuing this objective, we must also recognize that our students inhabit many worlds. They are discretely positioned within localized structures of privilege and inequity, and these localized positions affect how they engage in learning about international affairs. First, the Coronavirus elevates the importance of considering how students with marginalized identities experience both the pandemic and the study of global politics in distinct ways. Amid rising instances of pandemic-related racial discrimination that disproportionately impact students of color,⁵ COVID-19 presses us to reflect more deeply on how our teaching of global politics can better confront racial hierarchies. Some valuable starting points include engagement with recent work on race and IR,⁶ as well as pedagogical

¹ “Covid-19 Does Not See Race, Religion or Case before Striking, Says PM Modi,” *News18 India*, 19 April 2020, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/covid-19-does-not-see-religion-says-pm-modi-urges-unity-and-brotherhood-in-response-to-virus-2584111.html>.

² “Statement by the Secretary-General on COVID-19,” *United Nations Secretary-General*, 8 April 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-04-08/statement-the-secretary-general-covid-19>.

³ Roberta K. Timothy, “Coronavirus Is Not the Great Equalizer – Race Matters,” *The Conversation*, 6 April 2020, <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-is-not-the-great-equalizer-race-matters-133867>.

⁴ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, “‘Does It Matter if It’s a Discipline?’ Bawled the Child,” in Andreas Gofas, Inanna Hamati-Ataya, and Nicholas Onuf, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of the History, Philosophy and Sociology of International Relations* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2018), 336.

⁵ Rob Mentzer and Miranda Suarez, “As Xenophobic Attacks Increase in Wisconsin, Officials and Advocates Respond,” *Wisconsin Public Radio*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.wpr.org/xenophobic-attacks-increase-wisconsin-officials-and-advocates-respond>.

⁶ See, for example, Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Color Line* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); and Randolph B. Persaud and Alina Sajed, eds., *Race, Gender, and Culture in International Relations: Postcolonial Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2018). See also Alvina Hoffmann, “Interview - Lisa Tilley,” *E-International Relations*, 19 July 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/07/19/interview-lisa-tilley/>.

strategies for better integrating multiple axes of identity and inequality.⁷ Incorporating content that speaks directly to these axes through current events or historical context offers one pathway. Many of the Hmong-American students I work with, for example, engage in our materials about the Cold War and displacement through prisms of their personal connections to the consequences of U.S. proxy wars in Southeast Asia—including family members who are refugees from those wars. These students often communicate that the integration of content acknowledging the effects of the CIA’s Secret War in Laos not only makes our study of IR more meaningful to them, but also assists with navigating issues related to inclusion and belonging.

Second, the pandemic reminds us to consider how our students’ encounters with “the workings of power and hierarchies within international relations”⁸ can be shaped by their own (dis)advantages within local systems of power and hierarchy. For students who are already balancing academic course loads with long work hours and caretaking responsibilities, COVID-19 intensifies obstacles to health, security, and learning. Better understanding the variation in our students’ positions within local systems of privilege and experiences with the Coronavirus can not only help us reflect on best practices for addressing inequity within the classroom,⁹ but can also better position us to impart the value of studying global politics in ways that are meaningful to students’ lives. Beyond introductions typical at the start of a term, the evolving realities of the pandemic necessitate opening up additional opportunities for our students to communicate about their circumstances and the effects of COVID-19 on their lives. I used weekly email invitations encouraging students to share updates with me about new life challenges brought about by the pandemic. Another strategy is the incorporation of assignments with built-in space for personal reflection. I used a “Foreign Policy Portfolio” project in an upper-level course, with portfolio entry prompts spread across the semester. These prompts are adaptable for accommodating shifting current events and personal reflections that are related to foreign affairs and the pandemic.

For my introductory courses, I used a “Global Politics Reflection Paper” in which students linked a global politics issue of their choosing to aspects of their own lives. Many students chose to write about COVID-19 as a global politics issue, weaving together IR concepts from our course materials, current event research about the international effects of the disease, and their own localized experiences with the pandemic. Examples of personal connections included job and housing loss, family illness, wellbeing issues, and encounters with anti-Asian discrimination. Similar assignments and activities¹⁰ prompting students to draw connections between the global and local effects of COVID-19 can enrich our understanding of the worlds our students inhabit as they navigate the consequences of the Coronavirus on their own lives and on international affairs.

2. Layered Vulnerability

⁷ Amy Cabrera Rasmussen, “Toward an Intersectional Political Science Pedagogy,” *Journal of Political Science Education* 10:1 (2014): 102-116.

⁸ Frédéric Ramel, “Teaching International Relations through Arts: Some Lessons Learned,” *International Studies Perspectives* 19:4 (2018): 360-374, 361.

⁹ See, for example, Sara Goldrick-Rab, Jed Richardson, and Anthony Hernandez, *Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education* (Madison: Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2017), and Cia Verschelden, *Bandwidth Recovery: Helping Students Reclaim Cognitive Resources Lost to Poverty, Racism, and Social Marginalization* (Sterling: Stylus, 2017).

¹⁰ Note that the assignments and activities described in this essay were used for undergraduate class sections of 35-45 students and were adaptable to remote learning via Canvas.

That the harshest consequences of pandemics are “disproportionately experienced by the poor and marginalized—globally and within countries”¹¹ underscores the need to situate COVID-19 within broader IR patterns of overlapping and mutually reinforcing vulnerabilities. Issues such as environmental degradation, human rights violations, displacement, and the spread of infectious disease highlight crosscutting pressures that are shaped by an increasingly dense and interdependent web of political actors.¹² Prompting students to consider how migrants and refugees are impacted by the pandemic offers one option for bringing to life the intricacies of such multicausal mosaics. For my introductory global politics courses, I developed an online discussion prompt featuring a current event about refugee camp conditions during COVID-19.¹³ The prompt asked students to consider how our course concepts could be applied to the story. In their discussion posts, students noted that the camp residents were not only unable to practice social distancing, but also struggled with basic hygiene and medical needs—recognizing that multiple levels of vulnerability coalesced to heighten the risk of infection. Students also applied concepts related to our study of human rights, human security, state sovereignty, non-governmental organizations, and IR theories, suggesting that this example worked well for positioning COVID-19 within the broader topography of the course.

Similar activities could draw upon current event examples wherein migrants and refugees are prevented from working, accessing aid, or receiving asylum as a result of the Coronavirus, compounding the effects of economic precarity, sanitation shortages, misinformation, and life in high population density enclaves.¹⁴ Themes of layered vulnerability are also exemplified by the intensification of gender-based violence among migrant women during the pandemic,¹⁵ the suppression of human rights through the use of emergency powers,¹⁶ and the intersection of environmental and food insecurity with the spread of infectious disease.¹⁷ By integrating such examples, IR pedagogy can help students recognize the extent to which power asymmetries and matrices of overlapping insecurities condition global politics. Depending on their own encounters with layered vulnerability during the pandemic, such examples can additionally empower students to contextualize their experiences within prisms of an intertwined local-global nexus—as many students did in the “Global Politics Reflection Paper” described above.

¹¹ Matthew M. Kavanagh et al., “Ending Pandemics,” *Journal of International Affairs* 73:1 (2020): 49-68, 50.

¹² Amitav Acharya, “After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 31:3 (2017): 271-285, 276.

¹³ Maxwell Hall, “Two Refugees Explain What COVID-19 Means in Their Precarious World,” *World Economic Forum*, 10 April 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-poses-its-own-set-of-challenges-for-refugees>.

¹⁴ Justin Schon, “Protecting Refugees in the Middle East from Coronavirus: A Fight against Two Reinforcing Contagions,” *Project on Middle East Political Science*, April 2020, <https://pomeps.org/protecting-refugees-in-the-middle-east-from-coronavirus-a-fight-against-two-reinforcing-contagions>.

¹⁵ Cathy McIlwaine, “Living in Fear During the COVID-19 Crisis: Migrant Women with Insecure Immigration Status and Domestic Violence,” *King’s College London*, 9 April 2020, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/living-in-fear-during-the-covid-19-crisis-migrant-women-with-insecure-immigration-status-and-domestic-violence>.

¹⁶ Ramya Vijaya et al., “Coronavirus Versus Democracy,” *The Conversation*, 6 April 2020, <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-versus-democracy-5-countries-where-emergency-powers-risk-abuse-135278>.

¹⁷ Phillip Kleinfeld, “COVID-19 Hampers Response as ‘Perfect Storm’ of Locusts Builds in East Africa,” *The New Humanitarian*, 28 April 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2020/04/28/locusts-Africa-Kenya-Uganda-Ethiopia-Somalia>.

3. *Unknowability*

Neologisms such as *panic-gogy* and *pandemagogy* highlight new normative landscapes encouraging instructors to harness the pandemic as a moment for more critical reflection about the purpose of teaching while simultaneously acknowledging that surviving the semester and “getting through this” might be worthy goals in themselves.¹⁸ The teaching landscape for the year ahead remains ambiguous, with plans for multiple modes of delivery intermingling with decisions to remain online. Amid a wide range of scenarios for returning to the classroom, the pandemic calls attention to the value of wrestling with uncertainty in teaching and in international affairs. IR pedagogy can respond to this indeterminate terrain by explicitly weaving unknowability into the scaffolding of course design—both in terms of assignments that prompt students to think through uncertain outcomes and accommodating fluctuating COVID-19 realities into instruction.

Michalinos Zembylas describes a *pedagogy of unknowing* that provides opportunities for learners to relate to the Other, not “to know” but “to witness the unknowable” through reading, watching, and listening to accounts of another’s life while recognizing “the contingency of one’s subjectivities.”¹⁹ This relates to the previous section on layered vulnerability. Prompting students to engage with the perspectives of refugees, individuals facing the compounding effects of environmental and food insecurity, and others precariously positioned within international and local power structures amid COVID-19 can provoke reflection on the extent to which one’s own position constrains knowledge about the world. In discussion posts and final reflections, some students acknowledged how little they knew when encountering these perspectives and recognized their own limitations in fully imagining life under such conditions. Anjali Dayal and Paul Musgrave similarly emphasize the importance of helping students “normalize uncertainty” to better enable them to “see the world as complicated.”²⁰ In my upper level course I used a “Policy Memo” assignment that required students to think through some of the unknowables associated with the foreign policy recommendations they developed on an issue. Students wrote about areas of disagreement among scholars regarding the issue, difficulties in distinguishing between the causes of foreign policy outcomes, and the unpredictability of different political actors involved. Students also noted the uncertain effects of COVID-19 on alliances, trade, travel restrictions, and other factors in forging an indeterminate international political environment. Similar assignments or activities could encourage students to evaluate how the pandemic registers with other aspects of uncertainty in global politics.

In practicing Dayal and Musgrave’s notion of “responsible uncertainty”²¹ as instructors, we can build some degree of flexibility into our course design in order to anticipate changes in learning formats and shifts in the terrain of international affairs. One approach is to build more “TBD” components into syllabi that allow for instruction changes and the inclusion of new readings that connect the pandemic to IR concepts in valuable ways. Another approach is the use of discussion prompts or other activities organized around current events. The general parameters and learning objectives of such activities can be determined in advance—for example, recognizing layered vulnerabilities in global politics, applying IR theories, engaging with perspectives of the Other, or brainstorming the unknowability surrounding policy outcomes. Sketching out these learning goals prior to the semester facilitates the identification and incorporation of relevant current events that can capture the fluidity of COVID-19’s consequences.

¹⁸ Kelly J. Baker, “Panic-gogy: A Conversation with Sean Michael Morris,” *The National Teaching & Learning Forum* 29:4 (May 2020): 1-3.

¹⁹ Michalinos Zembylas, “A Pedagogy of Unknowing: Witnessing Unknowability in Teaching and Learning,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 24:2 (2005): 139-160, 151-52.

²⁰ Anjali Kaushlesh Dayal and Paul Musgrave, “Teaching Counterfactuals from Hell,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 30:1 (2018): 23-31.

²¹ Dayal and Musgrave, “Teaching Counterfactuals from Hell,” 29.

Finally, an emerging inventory of pedagogical lessons learned from COVID-19 stresses the need for compassion, empathy, and flexibility in interacting with students.²² Here, we might easily stumble into an essentialist framing that casts student worlds in terms of a pandemic/non-pandemic binary. Even once the constraints of the Coronavirus are removed, however, these principles remain important to support an approach that is attentive to layered vulnerabilities and uneven student experiences. Recognizing that the power hierarchies our students navigate will persist post-pandemic, we should aim to extend the lessons of COVID-19 into our non-crisis modes of instruction. Examples include sustaining the use of regular messages encouraging students to communicate about their situations and preserving activities that enable us to better understand what challenges students face within localized structures of privilege. As the Coronavirus spotlights the disproportionate effects of poverty, race, and other matrices of marginalization, we are not only pressed to situate these effects within global processes and encounters with the Other, but must also continue to reflect on how our own pedagogy can better promote equity and inclusion.²³

²² See, for example, Michelle D. Miller, “5 Takeaways From My Covid-19 Remote Teaching,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 6 May 2020, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/5-Takeaways-From-My-Covid-19/248713>, and Danielle B. Schwartz et al., “Educators Reflect on the COVID-19 Crisis,” *The National Teaching & Learning Forum* 29:4 (May 2020): 3-7.

²³ For some helpful starting points, see Dan Bousfield, Heather Johnson, and Jean Michel Montsion, “Racialized Hearts and Minds: Emotional Labor and Affective Leadership in the Teaching/Learning of IR,” *International Studies Perspectives* 20:2 (2019): 170-187; Rasmussen (2014); Verschelden (2017); and Rongal D. Watson, “Hard Truths: The Importance of Teaching Race in Introductory American Government and Politics for Undergraduates,” *Journal of Political Science Education* (2019), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2019.1693395>.

 ESSAY BY NICOLE WEGNER AND LAURA J. SHEPHERD, THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

“Teaching is impossible. Learning is unlikely. Why then enter the classroom? This is the question that is left. If we pose it non-rhetorically, it creates thinking space. My answer: we enter the classroom to encounter others. With them, we can meditate on the possibility of our own learning. All else is posing.”¹

How can we create thinking space? Our worlds are colliding. All of us come to the classroom with our prior knowledge, experience, commitments and blind spots from the worlds that we inhabit, worlds that are, in the words of Himadeep Muppidi, “distinctive and meaningful” to us.² We have to give of our own distinctive and meaningful worlds when we teach, to open ourselves, our sense-making, our not-knowns. We have to encounter and be encountered, engage and be engaged. Learning happens in the spaces between those worlds, distinctive and meaningful as they are. Venturing between, reaching out across those worlds takes courage. We can be caught, in the pedagogical moment, in a prismatic relationship with so many selves and others. In the day to day of our professional lives, in the time before,³ Naeem Inayatullah’s essay on teaching is a reminder of the hubris manifest in our positioning of ourselves as ‘teachers.’ In the classroom, we encounter worlds together and we “meditate on the possibility of our own learning,”⁴ Rarely do we teach.

Now, in this time more than ever, we need to re-visit, and re-imagine what we think we are doing in and with our pedagogy. Our worlds, and the worlds of our students, are in radical collision; our private spaces have been “requisitioned”⁵ and our classrooms are our bedrooms, our living rooms, our gardens. Our students are learning—or so we assume—not in our carefully constructed scholarly communities but alone, from their own requisitioned spaces. The dominant practice of synchronously teaching through video conference technology involves an unsettling invasion of our previous ‘private’ spaces; our worlds collide as we peer into each other’s most intimate spaces to work, teach, and engage.⁶ While the lecture theatre may have provided the physical, ‘public’ space for our previous pedagogical encounters, our place in these spaces has always been separate. Now, our worlds collide, and we don’t know yet what our pedagogy may enable, because many of us (the authors included) are neither skilled nor experienced in enabling encounters remotely.⁷

We have always been concerned with inclusive pedagogy, and as we have witnessed the scramble to reconfigure our offerings, to transform a curriculum planned around hours of face-to-face encounters into a series of remote lessons or online classes, we increasingly see a need to return to the principles of universal design for learning (UDL). Simply put, these principles

¹ Naeem Inayatullah, “Teaching is Impossible: A Polemic,” in *Pedagogical Journeys through World Politics* ed. Jamie Frueh (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2020), 18.

² Himadeep Muppidi, “Teaching Critical Thinking!? Strategies, Tools, and Methods,” comments from roundtable discussion held at 58th annual convention of the International Studies Association in Baltimore, 22-25 February 2017.

³ This is how time is measured now: there is before, and there is now, and there is occasionally tomorrow, or next week, of after. And we are suspended always in between.

⁴ Inayatullah, “Teaching is Impossible,” 18.

⁵ Fiona Jenkins, “Did our employers just requisition our homes?,” *The Canberra Times*, 4 April 2020, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6701054/did-our-employers-just-requisition-our-homes/>.

⁶ Dr. Raul Pacheco-Vega, Twitter post, 21 April 2020, 10:48 a.m. <https://twitter.com/raulpacheco/status/1252398875245023238>.

⁷ There are many hundreds of online Political Science and International Relations programs worldwide, and many hundreds of people who *are* skilled and experienced in designing remote learning. We recognise, and value, the scholarship and practices these people share, which we continue to learn from. If you are one of these people: this essay is probably not for you.

require *multiple modes of representation* with learning activities, creating flexibility for learners in the way that they can access the learning material, and *multiple opportunities for expression* throughout the learning activities, creating flexibility for learners in the ways that they can demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the learning materials.⁸⁹ These principles were important for pedagogy before; now, as our students collide with our expectations, are tangled in our inexperience and our arrogant insistence that we can teach now as we taught before, these principles are a buffer that might protect all of us from the damage that otherwise is likely to be sustained.

Multiple modes of representation are particularly important in the design of online and remote learning because online and remote learning is inherently challenging; students lack a number of physical supports present in the face-to-face classroom. Their home environments are unlikely to contain the type of designated space for which they can learn in an interrupted manner. Family members and roommates not-so-quietly mill in the background, laptops are balanced upon legs while propped up on the bed (perhaps the only space with a closed door), worksheets are strewn across the kitchen table. For many, it means competing for slow bandwidth with other household members streaming online, or having to view materials on a 5" smartphone screen. Students juggling care responsibilities coupled with the unpredictable needs of small children or other dependents means that a one-hour Zoom session may be riddled with interruptions. Students with hearing disabilities or those learning in a second language may struggle with the competing sounds of the household with patchy audio in a synchronous Zoom classroom. While the classroom has never been an equalized space, it has been a reserved space for engagement. Our new requisitioned spaces function as multi-spaces and our attention is scattered within our homes and between our screens. This is teaching, and learning, as worlds collide.

Multiple opportunities for expression create flexibility for students to demonstrate engagement and understanding in ways that create no disadvantage for any cohort within the class. UDL principles in face-to-face learning, for example, mean that learning should never be assessed solely in long-form writing, or in timed unseen examinations; a variety of assessment tasks and types reduces the stakes and (hopefully) thus diminishes the corollary anxiety a student might feel. Multiple opportunities for expression enhances student wellbeing as well as more accurately reflecting their learning throughout a course or module—if a student who struggles with writing is only ever assessed by essay, the depth of their understanding may never be revealed, but if that same student is tasked with developing a podcast, slide deck, or short video they might shine. Online, these multiple opportunities for expression also allow student to work around technological limitations, and to leverage their talents to support their best achievement, at time in which moments of self-realisation and joy are more precious than ever.

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How then, practically, might we rethink how we can deliver our courses in a way that draws upon UDL while recognizing the unique and challenging conditions created by learning in/from (through?) worlds in collision? We propose that there are some broad principles that can be used in our pedagogical approaches to emergency learning to help alleviate some of the tensions and magnified inequalities.

1. Do not demand your students' uninterruptable, regularly scheduled time as a mandatory component for accessing learning materials, but allow opportunities for synchronous engagement, recognizing that these synchronous activities should only be a small portion of overall learning experience.

⁸ CAST, *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines*, version 2.2.2018, <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

⁹ CAST, *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines*, also lists 'multiple means of engagement' as a core principle of UDL, but given that we are writing from and to a community of tertiary-level educators, means of engagement is often constrained by the requirements of the program and the approved curriculum. We focus here, therefore, on the remaining two principles that can reasonably inform our regular teaching practices.

We are not suggesting that synchronous engagement should be done away with altogether. There are very good reasons (particularly reasons of care, connection, and wellbeing) why we might want to check in with our students regularly. But mandating synchronous learning exacerbates the existing inequalities of access and resource among our student population; we would thus recommend offering the flexibility of asynchronous engagement with optional synchronous connections and one-to-one check-ins as needed, and where this is possible without overwhelming the instructor.

2. Develop supplementary materials with clear instructions that learners can access at a convenient time, with clear expectations that are repeatedly enforced.

It is easy to forget that we are ‘experts,’ to take for granted that students travel with us in lockstep as we journey through our learning materials, but this is more likely not the case. While in face-to-face learning, it is important to provide plenty of opportunity for students to check their understanding and for instructors to ensure that they are bringing every student with them as they proceed through discussion. In online and remote learning this is even more critical. Disparate senses of empowerment or entitlement that manifest in our classrooms—entitlement to interrupt discussion with questions, entitlement to ask for a recap or an alternative explanation—might be exacerbated in online and remote learning environments, in the absence of most non-verbal cues and other social indicators. Students may be wary of interrupting without a way to gauge how much interaction is expected or required. The power dynamics that have always existed in classroom encounters are amplified when we cannot gauge our relationship and our place in relation to others. It is very difficult to ‘read the room’ when the room is virtual. Learning materials should therefore offer multiple re-statements of key information, and ideally include section breaks with summaries of each section included as well as an opportunity for students to complete a self-evaluation to check understanding against key learning objectives. Building in opportunities for self-evaluation also encourages students to “meditate on the possibility of their own learning,” as Inayatullah puts it, which itself is valuable learning.

3. Consider what demands your assessments require; grading and evaluation in emergency reflects not only merit, but privilege.

While UDL promotes multiple modes of evaluation, we are no longer teaching and learning in reserved spaces. Many physical university libraries have been closed. Assessments must be completed within the requisitioned home-work space. The availability of uninterrupted time within this space, in addition to the physical conditions of the home-work space will influence students’ ability to meet assessment criteria effectively. We must be increasingly aware of the ways that ranked performance—grading—is not simply an indicator of merit. Grading is also likely to privilege students that have the luxury to ‘carry on’ as normal with the needed supports, and disadvantage students without entitlement to the resources needed to succeed. Does your class design require students to complete a timed exam, invigilated remotely in a limited time frame? Must students be required to interact with one another in particular ways with limited timelines to complete a joint project? These two scenarios may restrict the ability of students to effectively complete their assessments. Instructors may wish to implement pass/fail designations or carefully consider how they can accommodate students with restrictions on time and infrastructure. Presently, while magnified inequalities of the home-work space cannot be solved by pedagogy alone, awareness of these issues should inform how our assessments are created and evaluated. Importantly, the one element that instructors can exert control over is how they might compassionately accommodate students.

4. Set flexible deadlines, and respond with compassion when those deadlines are too much for students.

A pedagogy of compassion is always our touchstone, the guiding aspiration to which we return again and again after we (inevitably) fail in new and interesting ways to connect with our students and their worlds. Now, as these worlds are in collision, compassionate practice is more necessary than ever. bell hooks describes love “as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust”¹⁰; these are the values that structure our learning design and that

¹⁰ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (London: Routledge, 2003), 131.

infuse our responses when expectations are not, cannot be, met. It is hard for students to admit that they are not going to be able to deliver the expected work by the deadline (though here—as in all things—existing structures of power manifest in the increased entitlement of some students over others¹¹). Asking for extension is asking for compassion. In this request, students are making themselves vulnerable. They are taking a risk with their self-perception, and the perception we have of them and their commitment to the class. We should respond, always, to vulnerability with compassion.

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A pedagogy of compassion extends to our own engagement, our accounting of our own efforts and shortcomings. We are not delivering learning online. We are teaching in an emergency. We have not, in many cases, been given the time, or the tools, to learn how to create optimal resources for online and remote delivery. This is an *ad hoc* reconfiguration, one that collides with other tensions and challenges: anxieties about job insecurity, the impact of austerity, health risks, restrictions on mobility, and uncertain social, economic, and political futures. We therefore must be increasingly conscious of the likelihood of burnout and emotional depletion that accompanies our interactions, pedagogical and otherwise. The ‘new’ (temporary? timeless?) normal of back-to-back Zoom encounters is profoundly taxing, not only because the distractions of our requisitioned households interrupt our focus as we try to engage, but also as a result of the immense effort required in the absence of social cues, non-verbal language, and affective exchange between bodies. Our digital interactions require our bodies to be at full ‘alert’ for the duration of our encounter—listening, anxiously wondering when it is appropriate to speak or interrupt. Our digital encounters amplify the flight-or-fight sensations stirred by the chaotic present political world and require us to sit still when we may be thrashing internally. Burnout reduces our ability to compassionately respond and engage; this collision has no set end, but our adrenal response to it has limits.

Navigating these worlds in collision, we have the opportunity to learn, and to teach, matters beyond the narrow constraints of our curriculum. We have the opportunity to show our students our humanity, and to engage them with compassion. We have the opportunity to commit hope, and to connect in ways that are, per Muppidi’s formulation, “distinctive and meaningful,” in this time but beyond this time also. These are not normal times. We may not soon ‘return’ to normal times, and whatever the next times bring, the inequalities and power imbalances—revealed by the present fractures—that cause exclusions within our classrooms will remain. Inclusive pedagogy, a pedagogy of compassion, struggles to encounter these exclusions and work against them—in the classroom, so in the world. “Now, as educators, we cannot heal the shadow of our culture educating people to succeed in society as it is. We must have the courage to educate people to heal this world into what it might become.”¹²

¹¹ Jaewon Yoon, Ashley Whillans and Grant Donnelly, “Why We Don’t Ask for More Time on Deadlines (But Probably Should),” *Harvard Business Review*, 4 April 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/04/why-we-dont-ask-for-more-time-on-deadlines-but-probably-should>.

¹² Rachel Naomi Remen, “Educating for Mission, Meaning, and Compassion,” cited in hooks, *Teaching Community*, 181.