

# Engaging Students and Creating Online Community Teaching Remotely: Shared Experiences

Summary of virtual panel event held on July 9th, 2020  
[\[Link to video\]](#)



In the second virtual panel faculty, instructors and staff shared ways to create engaged students and online communities in their remote teaching.

## Panelists:

**Amanda Montague:** Postdoctoral Fellow, Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship

**Mark Busser:** Academic and Experiential Learning Coordinator, Faculty of Social Sciences

**Katie Moisse:** Assistant Professor, School of Interdisciplinary Sciences

**Sashaina Singh,** Office of Community Engagement

**Giancarlo Da-Re** and **Fawziya Isah,** MSU

## Panel Questions:

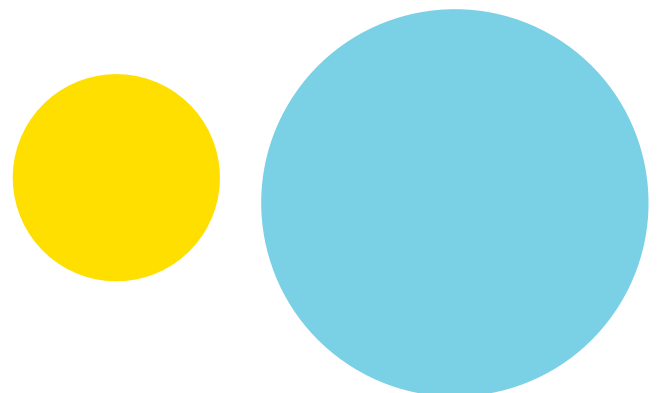
How do you connect with your students on a personal level?

How do you help your students feel supported and validated?

How do you encourage your students to connect?

## 4 Key Takeaways from the panel

1. Introductions are a great way to connect with students on a more personal level as you normally would in-person. Tools that were used included: Flip-Grid, Zoom, and Avenue to Learn Discussion Board.
2. Allow students to feel validated and supported by being open about how they are feeling. The panelists suggested opening virtual office hours and having check-ins before class.
3. Assign personal reflections that tie into the course and real-life to foster connections between instructors and students.
4. Tools such as Zoom and Avenue to Learn allowed students to be open and honest with each other. These virtual platforms helped them connect and work in groups with each other.



## Some key takeaways from each panelist

### Amanda Montague: Postdoctoral Fellow, Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship

- Connect with students on a more personal level by doing online ice-breakers. Using flip-grid allowed students to record short videos and see other's videos. [3:55]
- Integrate students' insights and reflections into class work, assignments, etc. An example would be an assignment to write a letter to their past selves pre-COVID. The more opportunities given to students to share, the more confident and eager students became with sharing their ideas. As a result, they felt more supported and validated. [5:20]
- Create lower stakes ways for students to participate, engage, connect and share ideas in an online format (e.g., marking only two out of the four discussion boards or have students present their work without being graded) [6:55]
- Have students do group work synchronously in breakout rooms on Microsoft Teams. Integrate digital tools that facilitate collaboration and record students' contributions. For example, a mind-mapping tool called Plectica. Tools for collaboration can be helpful for the instructor for marking as well as encouraging collaboration with students. [9:00]
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### Sashaina Singh, Office of Community Engagement

- Have students do introductions through Avenue to Learn discussion boards to help build connections. Students were required to share their favourite quote and did brief introductions over Zoom. [13:55]
- Three reflections throughout the course allowed for incorporation of those personal insights into the class and to understand how students were feeling during this time. [15:13]
- Conducting check-ins before class helped students feel supported and validated as COVID began to progress and allowed their emotional states could be honoured. [15:46]
- When the class was on Zoom, the students participated in breakout rooms and were given case studies every week. Participation marks were given out so there was eagerness to do it. This allowed the students to work in groups for assignments and connect with one another. [17:20]

### Katie Moisse: Assistant Professor, School of Interdisciplinary Sciences

- Flip-grid was used for students to record short videos and introduce themselves. Using this app created a feeling of community and helped with recognizing student's faces. [23:54]
- Ensure students understand that mental health is a priority to help them feel supported and validated. Set expectations about the learning community and respecting one another. Make it easy for students to meet and connect. [25:55]
- Katie included a lot of Flip-Grid for assignments so students could practice communication and comment on other videos. [28:56]
- Peer feedback activities were helpful to get feedback from everyone in the course. [29:49]

### Mark Busser: Academic and Experiential Learning Coordinator, Faculty of Social Sciences

- Social Reading apps (e.g., Perusall) can help students connect with each other and with content. These apps allow students to comment or highlight on web pages, articles or books, and connects them with the comments, questions or observations of their peers for further discussion. [36:49]
  - Works best in smaller sub-groups to make it more feasible on Persuall or Zoom.
- Be creative about how you use time. Where possible, help students manage their time by giving them options for participation (breaking up a 3-hour block between personal connection, open office hour, discussion, recorded lecture, etc.) [39:10]
- Reduce the amount of time students need to have their camera on. Encourage students to turn their cameras on during discussion (not recorded) and allow them to turn off their cameras during lecture to give them a screen break [41:20].
- To help record student feedback in a large class, use the survey tool in Avenue to Learn, it works the same as quizzes. [53:41].

## **Giancarlo Da-Re, MSU**

- Checking-in and gathering feedback from students is important. Being flexible about changing things up in response to this feedback is also important. [46:51]
- Breaking things up by giving students the option to turn cameras on and off is helpful. There are many reasons students may feel uncomfortable turning their camera on [48:13]
- Acknowledge that this is a different experience for everyone. Hearing this from instructors is validating for students. [49:00]
- Encourage students to let instructors know when they are struggling and to respond with openness, support and resources where appropriate (e.g., direct them to campus support offices MSU, MSAF, OMBUDS, etc.) [50:00]

# Engaging Students & Creating Community

## Virtual Panel Tool Summaries

*This tools summary was captured during the second Teaching Remotely Virtual Panel Session about “Engaging Students & Creating Online Community (July 9th, 2020)”*

This summary focuses on (1) what the tool is, (2) how it can be used, (3) if it can be integrated into Avenue, and (4) if there are associated costs.

### Brainstorming/Mapping tools

- [Plectica](#) is a visual mapping software, that connects information on the same page. You can create individual cards on a canvas, and organize, arrange, and connect them in real-time, with multiple contributors. You can use this program for brainstorming, identifying connections and patterns, and more. You do not need to download any software, but you must create an account. The Basic package is free, but Student and Pro packages have associated costs (\$3/month and \$8/month respectively). This cannot be integrated into Avenue.
- [Whiteboard Fox](#) is a simple online whiteboard, letting you draw on a virtual whiteboard, where people can watch and contribute in real-time. You can also easily take a screenshot of the whiteboard, allowing you to save the content created. You do not need to download software or create an account, and a link to your whiteboard can easily be shared with students to view and participate. There is no cost. This cannot be integrated into Avenue.
- Microsoft OneNote is often used for notetaking, but by sharing [Class notebooks](#), you can collaborate in real time on notes or larger written projects with others. Create new tabs and pages for each topic, and share through a wide variety of means, including through integrating OneNote on Microsoft Teams. This app requires a Microsoft365 account, which McMaster provides to all students.
- [Microsoft Whiteboard](#) is a simple and free whiteboard app, letting you draw, use post-it notes, and more in a collaborative environment. There are templates to start from, or you can select a blank whiteboard. The app is free, as long as you have a free Microsoft account or paid Microsoft365 account (which all students have access to through McMaster). The app does not integrate into avenue, but does integrates seamlessly into Microsoft Teams.
- [Padlet](#) is a web-hosted board, where you can easily add post-in notes, rearranging content and connecting content with lines and arrows. Changes are autosaved, and the host can limit access to collaborators, including read-only, writing-only, admin access, or revoke access. You can also upload and/or embed a wide range of file types, including spreadsheets, photos, and videos. This can be used for brainstorming, creating a live question bank, check-ins or check-outs, article discussions, and more. The host will need to have a free account, but students can contribute

and collaborate through a simple link sharing (or through a free downloadable app). This can be integrated to Avenue using [widgets](#).

- [ExoBrain](#) is a simple mind-mapping program with limited functionality, making it easy to learn and use. The base account is free, while the Pro account is \$3/month. This cannot be integrated into Avenue.
- [Coggle](#) is a program designed to easily make mind maps in a real-time and collaborative environment. You can easily add people to join your board to collaborate and use a chat function to discuss any changes you are making. The basic plan is free but requires all collaborators to have an account to work. The “Awesome” plan (\$5/month) allows for collaboration by link, instead of by account access. This can be integrated into Avenue using [widgets](#).

## Real-Time Student Engagement Tools

- [Flipgrid](#) is a video-based social learning platform that you can use for discussions and to create an online learning community. You can create a “grid” or online learning space for your course and invite students to create and share videos with their peers; for example, you can use Flipgrid for student introductions, reflections, and mini-presentations. Students can record their selfie style videos directly on Flipgrid, can add uploaded photos or videos, and can add engaging features like a whiteboard, video styles, text, emojis, and inking. Instructors can enable or disable closed-captioning and can edit the captions on students’ videos. Flipgrid is free to use and can be embedded into Avenue using an embed (</>) code. Check out this [step-by-step video](#) by Katie Moisse to add Flipgrid to your Avenue course.
- [Mentimeter](#) is an interactive presentation platform that you can use to engage with and collect feedback from your students both synchronously and asynchronously. Mentimeter features customizable content, quiz, and question slides, with up to four interactive question slides per presentation on its free version. Question types include wordclouds, multiple choice, open ended, ranking, scale, and Q&A options, with added options to anonymize or allow multiple responses based on type. After creating a Mentimeter presentation, you can share the access code with your students and review their responses in real-time. You can also show and download the results, close voting, and clear the responses for reusing the presentation. Mentimeter has a free account option for educators (with unlimited presentations but a limit of four question slides per) and paid basic (\$6.99/month) and pro accounts (\$14.99/month) account options are available. Mentimeter cannot be integrated into Avenue to Learn.
- [Zoom polls](#): Zoom’s polling feature allows you to collect real-time feedback from your students during a Zoom meeting. You can create poll questions when scheduling a meeting or in real-time during the meeting. Poll questions can have up to 10 options, and students can select either one response (i.e., single choice) or as many responses as they would like (i.e., multiple-choice). Each poll can have multiple questions, and you can create up to 25 polls per meeting. The meeting Host can launch, monitor, and close polls, and responses can be shared back with students and downloaded as a report at the end of the meeting. Zoom polls must be enabled on a licensed Zoom account (free to McMaster staff, faculty, and students) and they cannot be integrated into Avenue.

- **Teams polls:** Using the Microsoft Forms extension, you can create an instant, real-time polls within your Microsoft Teams' channel or chat. Each poll includes one single or multiple-choice question with up to six response options. You and your students can see the results roll in in real-time, and you can track students' individual responses to the poll at forms.office.com. MS Teams Polls are free to use for all MS Teams users. They cannot be integrated into Avenue to Learn, though MS Teams meetings can be added as a widget.
- **Kahoot!** is a freely accessible game-based learning platform that allows users to create new quizzes or choose from a repository of over 40 million "ready-to-play" games and questions. You can use Kahoot! to create engaging "live" quizzes for students to complete with (and "compete" against) their peers during synchronous class time or use a student-paced Kahoot! quiz to "challenge" students to apply and self-check their understanding asynchronously. Students enter the game PIN on their device to play and receive real-time feedback on their responses throughout the quiz. You can use quizzes for test practice and review, and to identify knowledge gaps or areas that may require additional instruction. Kahoot! does not integrate with Avenue to Learn, though Kahoot! quizzes can be shared asynchronously through Microsoft Teams.

## Survey tools

- **Lime Survey** is a free, open-source statistical survey application that can be used to create and publish online surveys, collect student feedback, generate statistics, and export response results. Question types include multiple choice, five- or ten-point choice arrays, ranking, dropdown lists, open text, radio buttons, numerical input, and more. Surveys can be public or restricted, anonymized, accessible at set times, and imported or duplicated. McMaster students, staff, and faculty can register for a free McMaster Limesurvey account to access the McMaster-branded survey template. Limesurvey cannot be integrated into Avenue to Learn.
- **Google Forms** is an online survey tool that allows users to collaboratively create, edit, and administer surveys at the same time. You can use Google forms to collect feedback from your students through a variety of question options including multiple choice, checkboxes, dropdown lists, linear scales, open texts, and grids. The survey can be public or restricted to McMaster email accounts, and anonymized or tracked by respondent. You can review a summary of compiled student feedback, including automatically generated bar and pie graphs depicting frequency of responses, or review by individual question or respondent. Google Forms is free with a Google account, and is included in the Google Drive office suite. It cannot be integrated into Avenue to Learn.
- **Avenue survey:** The Avenue to Learn survey tool allows you to create and integrate surveys directly into your Avenue course shell. You can use the survey tool to collect student feedback across a variety of question types including true/false, multiple choice, open text, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and Likert scales. Survey responses can be anonymous or connected to students' MAC ID's, and both class and individual statistics are generated for review. Avenue's survey tool is free to use and automatically integrated under the "Course Administration" menu, making it a popular choice for course evaluations.
- **Microsoft Forms:** Microsoft Forms can be used to create online surveys, polls, and quizzes, and export results to Microsoft Excel. You can use a Form survey to collect real-time feedback from your

students using multiple choice, open text, rating, ranking, and Likert scales. You can also use a Form quiz to check students' understanding during or following a lesson and can share this quiz in a Microsoft Teams learning space. Quizzes can be automatically graded as correct or incorrect with an option to provide feedback to students based on their response. Quiz statistics include the average time to complete the quiz and the distribution of responses across each question. Microsoft Forms is free to all McMaster students, staff, and faculty with an Office365 account. Forms cannot be integrated into Avenue directly, though Microsoft Teams meetings can be integrated through the custom widgets list.

## Peer-to-peer learning/feedback tools

- [PeerScholar](#) is an online peer and self-assessment tool where students submit assignments to get feedback from their peers. After submitting their own assignment, students receive an anonymous sub-set of assignments from the classroom to provide feedback, encouraging students to help each other communicate more effectively and think more critically. The program also allows for self-assessment, reflection, and revision of their own assignments. PeerScholar is a free program, but each student will need to create an account. This is not integrated into Avenue.
- [Kritik](#) is a peer-to-peer learning platform, to help develop higher order learning (e.g., critical thinking, effective communication). Through the platform, students submit assignments, evaluate other students' assignment, and provide feedback. Students can work independently or in group projects and can dispute evaluations they disagree with. Data-driven insights also allows instructors or TAs to flag at-risk or disengaged students, to help keep them on track. It is free for educators and basic plans are free for students (premium plans are capped at \$40/year, although financial assistance is available). This is not integrated into Avenue.

## Social Reading/Collaborate Annotation

- [Perusall](#) is a social reading platform that allows students and instructors to annotate assigned readings. Students can write comments, upvote comments, use hashtags, attach links, and even use emoticons. Perusall is free for students, instructors, and educational institutions, however, there are costs associated with certain content. For example, instructors can upload their own content for students to annotate for free, and Open Educational Resources can also be used in Perusall for free. But if instructors want to assign a textbook or other monograph for use in Perusall, students will need to purchase the text from Perusall's catalogue of 200 000+ titles from leading publishers. Perusall can be integrated into learning management systems by following the instructions [here](#).
- [Hypothes.is](#) is a free, open-source tool that allows users to collaboratively annotate classroom readings, news, blogs, scientific articles, books, terms of service, ballot initiatives, and more. To use Hypothesis, users must [add the extension to their browser](#) and create an account. Hypothesis can also be integrated into learning management systems, like Avenue to Learn, which enables students to engage in discussion right on top of course readings. Both students and instructors can then add comments and start conversation in the margins of texts. To set this up, you will need to contact the Hypothesis directly, which you can do [here](#).

- [Manifold](#) is an open-source publishing platform for scholarly publishing, allowing users to annotate, highlight, discuss, cite, and share passages from any Manifold text. Authors and publishers are also able to include additional information beyond the scope of the article or book (e.g., supplemental resources, raw data, videos). Grant funded, this program is always free to use, but is not incorporated in Avenue.
- [Genius](#) allows you to annotate any webpage without downloading additional software or browser extensions. Students will need to create a free account, but can then easily share their annotated web pages, or view them on their profile at a later date. As an instructor, you can also request a semi-private class page, to better monitor students' work, organize assignments, and more. This is free to use, but cannot be integrated into Avenue.

## Digital Storytelling Tools

- [ThingLink](#) is a digital tool for creating interactive graphics. Users can augment images with audio, video, text, and informational links. ThingLink offers deep integration with Microsoft Office 360 – content creation for image, video, and 360 media is fully supported inside Microsoft Teams and interactive content sharing is supported to OneNote and Teams. Instructors can create a free account that allows for the creation of interactive images in public mode. There is also a premium option for \$35.00/year and an institutional license starting at \$1000.00/year.
- [Storymap JS](#) is a free digital tool that allows users to tell a story by highlighting the locations of a series of events. Users can add slides for each place in a story, setting the location using a basic address search. There are a number of preset maps available, or users can customize their own. It is also possible to tell stories with large photographs, works of art, historic maps, or other image files. Storymap JS can pull in media from a variety of sources, including Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, Google Maps, Wikipedia, SoundCloud, Document Cloud, and more. Completed storymaps can be embedded on a variety of sites, including Avenue to Learn.
- [Timeline JS](#) is a free, open-source digital tool that allows users to tell a story in a timeline format. Users can create visually rich and interactive timelines using a Google spreadsheet. More advanced users can use JSON to create custom installations. Timeline JS can pull in media from a variety of sources, including Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, Google Maps, Wikipedia, SoundCloud, Document Cloud, and more. Completed timelines can be embedded on a variety of sites, including Avenue to Learn.
- Omeka is a web-publishing platform for sharing digital collections and creating online exhibits. There are two options: [omeka.org](#) and [omeka.net](#). The decision whether to use omeka.org or omeka.net will depend on your project goals. Both versions support collaborative authoring. Neither version can be integrated directly into Avenue.
  - Omeka.org is a free digital curation platform. It is highly customizable and there is no storage cap; however, it is more difficult to manage and make changes. The user is also responsible for maintenance.
  - Omeka.net is a paid digital curation platform. It is easy to manage. Omeka will update the site on your behalf as updated versions of the software are released. There is a storage cap (dependent on the plan you purchase) which can make certain kinds of content difficult to work with, such as large video or audio files. Pricing begins at



\$35.00/year for the basic plan.

- [Scalar](#) is a free, open-source publishing platform designed to allow users to write long-form, born-digital scholarship online. Scalar enables users to curate media from multiple sources and juxtapose them with their own writing in a variety of ways. It requires minimal technical expertise while allowing users to take advantage of the unique capabilities of digital writing, including nested, recursive, and non-linear formats. Scalar supports collaborative authoring and reader commentary. Scalar is completely free to use and supported by the University of Southern California. Users simply need to create an account to get started. Scalar cannot be integrated directly into Avenue.
- [Timemapper](#) is a free, open-source tool for creating interactive timemaps – timelines with data points connected to geographic maps. Timemaps are created using data entered into a Google Timesheet. Completed timemaps can be accessed online or embedded in your own website, including Avenue to Learn.

## Office Hour Scheduling tools

- [Calendly](#) is a free online tool to help simplify booking meetings. Either by sharing a link or creating a widget for your Avenue course home page, students can pick from timeslots that follow the rules you've created (regarding availability, and length of time, etc.). Once they've picked a timeslot, it syncs to both calendars, and sends a reminder email to the student. This is a free to use tool and can be integrated in Avenue using a widget. Check out the [step-by-step video](#) by Katie Moisse to add Calendly to your Avenue course page.