

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Online Teaching: Where to Begin?

Many universities across the world have suddenly shifted to online learning in response to the COVID-19 crisis, and online learning is likely to become more and more common, both in the short-term as a crisis response, and in the long-term as post-secondary institutions see benefits to online learning.

It is critical that an equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens informs this transition. EDI considerations are in danger of falling by the wayside as administrators evaluate which aspects of teaching and learning are deemed “critical” and which are not (Williams, 2020). Paradoxically, without an EDI lens, online learning, which is often assumed to make learning more accessible, can actually exacerbate pre-existing inequities. Similar to in-person learning environments, online learning involves widely varying levels of access to technology and resources as well as different student accessibility needs. This document provides a starting point for instructors as they adapt and develop courses and material to online formats, making them as accessible as possible while avoiding unintentionally reproducing or exacerbating inequities.

1.0 Gauge student needs

If you need to gauge students’ varying access to technologies and their needs for support, you can conduct an anonymous survey by using a tool such as [Qualtrics](#). In addition, create multiple ways (e.g., email, phone, or [virtual office hours](#)) in which students can contact you with their needs.

2.0 Be sensitive and proactive about student needs

At the same time, be aware that some students may feel vulnerable to disclose their lack of access to technologies and request individual accommodations. It is therefore best to assume that some of your students do not have access to digital devices and/or reliable internet and design your course with flexibility in how students access the course.

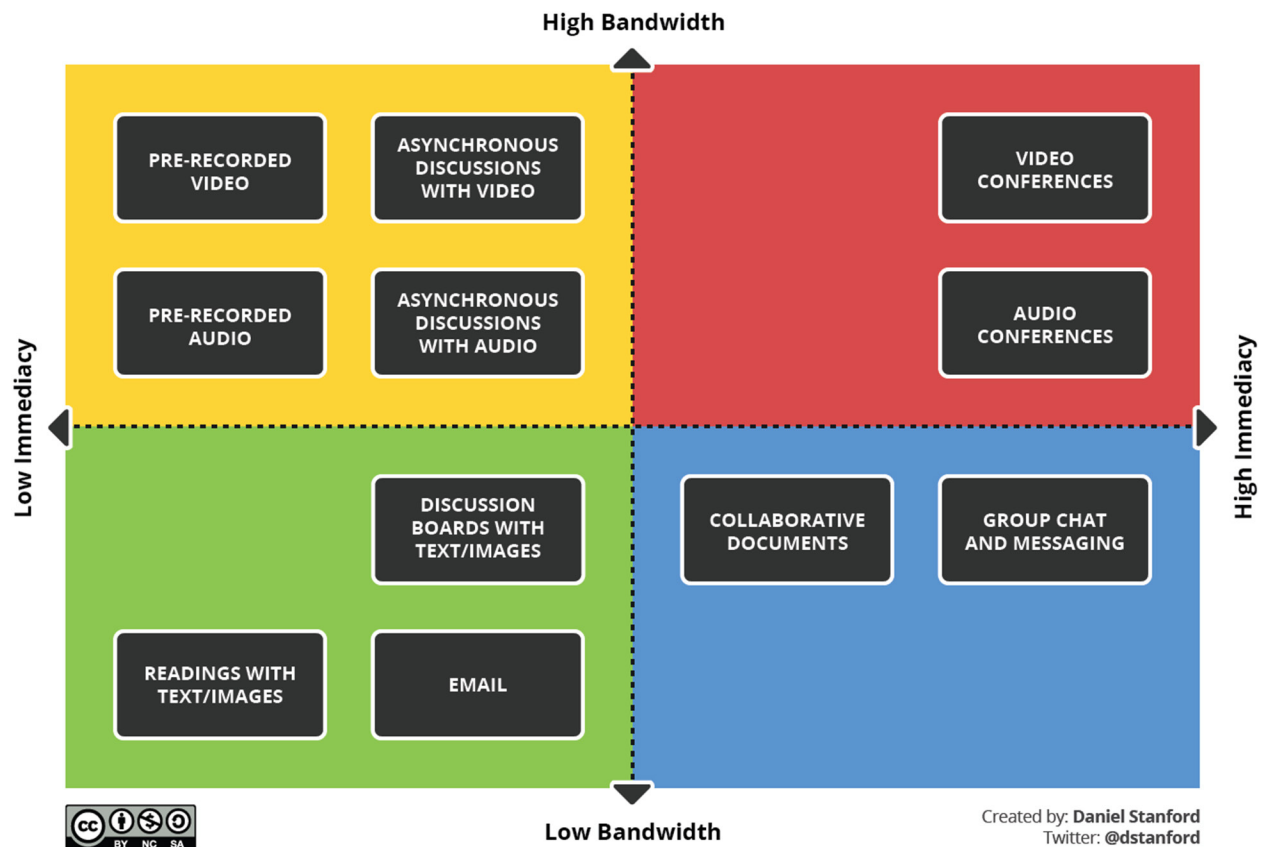
3.0 Use asynchronous approaches as much as possible

Consider asynchronous approaches that do not require students to be dialed in at the same time. Many students may not be physically located in the same time zone, and working with a fixed synchronous schedule can be challenging for students. Some of them might have busy schedules and/or caregiving responsibilities, others may not be able to freely access the internet or a quiet room. Implementing online office hours, for example, can give students the flexibility to discuss issues related to the class during times that work best for them.

4.0 Adopt low bandwidth pedagogies

Stay as low tech as possible. Some students have limited data plans. Others may not have access to a laptop and may be following the class using only their mobile phone. Consider how this might impact content delivery. This graphic by Daniel Stanford is a handy tool to evaluate the pros and cons of high vs. low bandwidth and immediacy.





(www.iddblog.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/bandwidth-immediacy-matrix-by-Daniel-Stanford.png)

5.0 Offer flexibility and options

Try to be as flexible as possible to allow different ways in which students can access and engage with the course. Also, adopt flexible assessment mechanisms to ensure that you assess student learning, not their access or lack thereof. Consider flexible deadlines and offer alternative assignments for students to choose from (e.g., for group work you may give students a choice between an online chat room style discussion or collaborating on a google doc). Allowing students some control and autonomy over their learning can help combat feelings of helplessness and isolation that can come with online learning.

6.0 Make your materials accessible

Evaluate your materials with an accessibility lens - who can access them and who cannot - and try to increase the accessibility of the materials as much as you can. If you are recording videos, for example, use software or platforms that can transcribe them for you using speech to text technology. Captions are helpful not only for those who have hearing difficulties but also for those for whom English is not their primary language or who need to watch the videos in noisy environments. [The Digital Content and Media Accessibility guide](#) from UBC's Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology, also contains useful information.



7.0 Scaffold online learning

Make assignments low stakes or no stakes if you're using a new online tool or platform. Focus first on allowing students to grow accustomed to using different functions of the platform (e.g., contributing via a chat function, posting in discussion threads, sharing their reactions via buttons). Once students get more comfortable with the format you can consider adjusting to more high stakes assignments.

8.0 Offer frequent and transparent guide for student learning

Continue to stay in contact with students, and stay as transparent as possible. Explain why you're prioritizing certain material or asking students to read or do certain things.

9.0 Start small and recognize that your course is a work-in-progress

You may find all the considerations we have provided in this document overwhelming. Instead of trying to implement them all at once, start with something small within what your capacity and resources allow. You may begin with making one small change for one particular student need addressed, and you can start building your inclusive online teaching practice from there. Keep in mind that even one small change can help many students in different ways and that your course will continue changing because what works best for one class may need adjustment in another. You will always need to be attuned to students' needs as well as what works for you, while making changes along the way.

Sources:

Visit the [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Online Teaching: Where to Begin? wiki page](#) for a full list of references.



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