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### LTC & AT Resource: Planning for synchronous disucussion

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## LTC & AT Resource: Planning for synchronous discussion

We are strongly encouraging all faculty to plan for their courses to be mostly asynchronous. This requires a bigger shift in your thinking as you plan, but also will make the course more robust when students or faculty have issues with internet performance, which is likely given the immense demands being put on infrastructure. That being said, including optional opportunities for synchronous engagement can help build community and supplement the asynchronous activities you are developing. *However, you should not plan for synchronous engagement to be the backbone of course engagement.*

### **Benefits of synchronous online discussion:**

- Most similar to what you are familiar with in your face-to-face classroom
- Can build community and social presence.

### **Challenges of synchronous online discussion:**

- Accessibility issues -- tech, time zones, internet performance, students with disabilities.
- Harder to concentrate on a video conference call for an extended period of time than a face-to-face discussion.
- It requires a lot of bandwidth. Most video conferencing software also allows for people to dial in by phone. Are you prepared for the situation if students both dial in and connect via computer?

### **Considerations in designing synchronous discussions:**

- Clearly explain what the goals are for student engagement via synchronous discussion, and make sure you have appropriately articulated the ground rules.
- Think about how to structure engagement.
- Clearly articulate your expectations for participation in each discussion.

### **Structuring engagement of online synchronous discussion:**

- Having a quality synchronous online discussion with even 20 people is extremely difficult. Rather than meeting with the whole class at one time, consider meeting with smaller groups spread throughout the 2-3 scheduled class meeting times each week. For small groups, consider starting the synchronous session with a whip around where every participant makes a short contribution. This provides a built in tech check.
- Consider having a more structured approach for how engagement will move between various participants.
- Managing comments and questions can be harder in an online synchronous session:
  - Decide how students should let you know that they want to make a contribution, rather than just allowing individuals to “jump in”
  - Consider designating one student each session who is a question/comment moderator through chat, rather than trying to keep an eye on chat on yourself.

**Tips for a successful synchronous session:**

- Distribute content in advance (readings, notes, videos, etc) -- do not plan to use synchronous meeting time for any significant amount of content delivery.
- Use the synchronous meeting time for Q&A (collect questions ahead of time), discussion of content, or group activities.
- Don't plan for synchronous engagement for the entire class meeting time. Break it up:
  - Short synchronous session (~30 minutes)
  - Students spend some time offline (doing an activity, quick writing, reflecting on the discussion)
  - Wrap-up by reconvening everyone for another sort synchronous session.

**Tools to use:**

- Google Hangouts Meet
- Zoom