# Formative Education Online:

## CULTIVATING WHOLENESS, PURPOSE, AND COMMUNITY IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

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### INTRODUCTION

Formative education is a holistic educational approach that is so prevalent at Boston College that many faculty members describe it simply as "good teaching." Sometimes used interchangeably with its broader analogue, "whole person education," formative education draws from the Jesuit interpretation of *cura personalis,* or "care of the whole person," which understands that students and teachers are complex and multidimensional beings. As one faculty member notes, "In order to educate the entire person, you have to understand the person and you need to care for that person. And you need to provide a space for that whole person to show up." It is clear that this ethic of care is something that BC educators are familiar with and practice in their classrooms.

However, in Spring 2020, the pandemic-induced shift to remote instruction raised concerns about the possibility of maintaining robust formative education in online learning environments. Is formative education still feasible in remote, online contexts? Can successful student formation still occur in times of global crisis? Our analysis of interviews and course artifacts gathered from 38 BC faculty members allow us to answer affirmatively.

This Practice Guide summarizes the key insights from 38 Dean-nominated faculty members, with representation from each of the eight BC schools.[1] This document offers a set of pedagogical strategies used by BC colleagues to foster holistic student development in both in-person and online environments. The Practice Guide is organized thematically with respect to three interrelated components of formative education at Boston College: **wholeness, purpose, and community**. Each section first provides a brief description of one aspect of formative education. Then the Practice Guide describes teaching practices used by faculty to achieve each formative goal. In the first section, we offer brief descriptions of the 13 strategies. Later in the document, we give more detailed descriptions of each practice, in Appendix A. Finally, the Practice Guide provides reflective questions that can guide future implementation of these formative pedagogical strategies.

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[1] More information about the methodology is available in Appendix B.

**WHOLENESS:** *Attending to Multiple Dimensions of Student Development*

Formative education fosters student development along multiple dimensions of human life, including intellectual, social, ethical, civic, and spiritual. Faculty members in this study agreed that students' intellectual development most often takes priority in the classroom, and that this sometimes draws educators' attention away from other important developmental outcomes. Many faculty members addressed the pressing need to attend to students' socio-emotional well-being during this time of crisis, as well as the importance of recognizing and engaging students' ethical, political, and spiritual dimensions in the classroom. Faculty members not only spoke to multiple dimensions, but also to the interconnections between these aspects of human life. As several faculty noted, educators should not see these aspects as separated, but rather an integrated whole.

### Practice 1: Foster Social-Emotional Development

» Build a trustworthy classroom community

» Explicitly acknowledge the emotional nature of students' lives

» Provide opportunities for students to be vulnerable

» Model vulnerability

» Provide opportunities for students to bring their personal & emotional lives to their assignments

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

### Practice 2: Foster Spiritual Development

» Facilitate open discussions in the classroom about spirituality

» Provide opportunities for mindfulness and contemplative practices

» Create space during office hours for students to discuss their spirituality

» Integrate course material with service learning or other real-world experiences that engage spiritual questions

» Use writing assignments to help students reflect on spiritual issues

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

## *Practice 3: Deepen Intellectual Development*

» Provide multiple options or formats for students to demonstrate their learning

» Allow students to choose their own topics for projects or papers, within the scope of the course

» Create opportunities for students to take the lead in teaching a class or facilitating discussion

» Ask students to evaluate themselves and their peers on assignments and their progress towards course goals

» Challenge students to apply their coursework in "real-world" or beyond the classroom contexts

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

## *Practice 4: Encourage Students to Make Personal and Contextual Connections*

» Incorporate content from current events into the lectures and class discussions

» Allow students to choose assignment topics that are of interest to them

» Integrate students' personal contexts into the course

» Highlight classmates as experts to bring subject matter to life

» Develop discussion board prompts that explicitly ask students to make connections between the course content and their personal experiences

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

## *Practice 5: Model Whole-Person Engagement*

» Avoid compartmentalizing yourself as a teacher

» Be vulnerable and honest with your students

» Relinquish the idea of always being the "expert" in the classroom

» Hold yourself to the same standards as your students

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR FOSTERING WHOLENESS**

In order to foster whole person development, consider the following reflection questions as prompts in reflecting on your classroom or teaching practices:

- Which dimensions of human functioning—intellectual, social, emotional, ethical, spiritual, physical, and so on—does your course attend to? Which aspects are emphasized and why? Which aspects are omitted and why?

- Is your course holistic? How can you better foster a sense of integration or connectedness across dimensions?

**PURPOSE:** *Connecting Coursework to Students' Experiences and Aspirations*

Formative education encourages students to reflect on the larger *purpose* of their lives, as a way of guiding them toward better decisions and greater fulfillment. Purpose, in this context, is defined by BC faculty as nurturing students' motivations beyond instrumental goals (e.g. grades, high salary, prestige), mentoring them in the process of vocational discernment, and cultivating motivations that extend beyond the self. In this way, purpose connects students with the community, because, as one faculty member states, "purpose is never just about oneself, but about one's relationship to others."

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### *Practice 6: Cultivate Students' Sense of Civic Purpose*

» Integrate multiple avenues to encourage students' reflection and engagement with social issues

» Review case studies to bring in different perspectives and hypothetical situations for students to grapple with subject matter

» Encourage students to engage with current events

» Create assignments that give students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences within the current context

» Be intentional about the texts that your students will read

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

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### *Practice 7: Cultivate Students' Sense of Vocational Purpose*

» Encourage students to think like professionals in their field

» Invite students to simulate professionals in their fields

» Share experiences from a professional standpoint

» Introduce students to authentic tools and resources used by professionals in the real world

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

## *Practice 8: Cultivate Students' Sense of Academic Purpose*

> » Engage in formal and informal academic advising and mentoring relationships with students
>
> » Help students make connections between the content and their academic goals
>
> » Help students refine their academic goals by interacting with professionals in their field and related fields
>
> » Provide students opportunities to learn from one another

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

## *Practice 9: Cultivate Students' Sense of Spiritual Purpose*

> » Encourage students to engage in self-reflection
>
> » Incorporate written assignments that allow students to reflect on their spiritual lives
>
> » Ask students to revisit critical questions on multiple occasions throughout the semester
>
> » Provide opportunities for students to consider the spiritual aspects of their future vocations

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR CULTIVATING PURPOSE

In order to foster students' sense of purpose, consider the following reflection questions as prompts in reflecting on your classroom or teaching practices:

- How does your course engage students with questions of purpose? Are students asked to contemplate their individual role in a broader moral order and social context?

- In reviewing your course, where can you incorporate reflective activities that allow students to contemplate ideas and aspirations beyond the self? Where can you challenge students to make connections between the course content and a larger system or order, including spiritual, social, ecological, or political?

**COMMUNITY:** *Fostering Relationships Within and Beyond the Classroom*

Formative education takes place in *community* with others, who help students articulate their pathways and participate in collective projects. BC faculty describe community as a network of relationships that incorporates the immediate family or community, but also "transcend[s] boundaries that divide people. So that human purpose is always a commitment, in some ways, to the world." Community, therefore, could refer to the global human community all the way down to the more immediate classroom community, which includes teachers, students, and sometimes even the thinkers from course readings.

### *Practice 10: Build classroom community*

» Take advantage of technological tools

» Incorporate group projects

» Hold one-on-one meetings as a general check-in, beyond the course or subject matter

» Be flexible and accommodate students' needs

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

### *Practice 11: Build Professional Community*

» Organize a panel of professionals, experts, and alumni to bring multiple perspectives into the class

» Host guest lectures with experts in the field

» Create assignments that ask students to interview experts and role models

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

### *Practice 12: Facilitate Connections with the Broader Community*

» Incorporate teaching materials and take it beyond the classroom context

» Be creative in connecting with the broader community

» Connect students to professionals in the field

*Click here for further detail on using this practice.*

## Practice 13: Design Your Course to Foster Community

### Practice 13a: Communicate Clear Expectations

» Clearly communicate learning goals and explicitly connect goals to each lesson

» Swiftly communicate course updates and provide students feedback

» Set a routine for each class that includes some predictable elements

» Communicate expectations for how students should use Zoom

» Provide clear and detailed directions for every assignment, no matter how small

» Set expectations for group work

*Click here* for further detail on using this practice.


### Practice 13b: Ensure Equitable Access to Course Resources & Support

» Have students practice using technology platforms

» Provide multiple opportunities for students to connect with instructors

» Incorporate asynchronous elements into the course

» "Flip" the classroom

» Implement accessible exam policies

*Click here* for further detail on using this practice.


### Practice 13c: Incorporate Student Feedback

» Validate students' course goals

» Collect anonymous student feedback

» Solicit students' questions before class · Have students peer review assignments

» Use online platforms that appeal to students

» Regularly consult small groups of students for course feedback

*Click here* for further detail on using this practice.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR CREATING COMMUNITY**

In order to foster a greater sense of community, consider the following reflection questions as prompts in reflecting on your classroom or teaching practices:

- How do you/does your course envision relationships within and beyond the classroom?

- Which community relationships do you prioritize in your course: classroom community, professional community, identity-affiliated community, disciplinary community, others? Why?

- Which form of community-building would be most beneficial to fostering students' individual development and sense of purpose? Can you identify any potentially generative sources of community building in your course or curriculum?

- With whom can you collaborate with in order to foster greater community in your course (e.g. students, fellow educators or administrators, staff, community leaders, alumni)?

Despite the challenges that occurred in transferring to online teaching, many faculty members reported the benefits of using technology to enhance formative education. The use of online spaces and tools has contributed to improvements in the following five areas.

1. **Online learning provides opportunities to connect with people outside Boston College more easily.** After transitioning to online learning, it was common for faculty to invite people from around the world to join a class, which would not have been as likely before. Some guests joined class during a synchronous session, while other guests pre-recorded videos. Among the guests were Boston College alumni and several celebrities. Some guests later provided their email addresses so students could reach out and make further connections beyond the classrooms.

2. **Online learning allows students more flexibility.** In the case of asynchronous sessions, online learning provides students an opportunity to work at a time that is most convenient for them. This can be especially useful for students living in different time zones from Boston College. One professor noted that asynchronous sessions can also work better for students without internet access in their homes or with relatively weak internet connections.

3. **Online learning can foster higher-order thinking.** During in-person sessions, students need to react immediately to their classmates' comments. In contrast, faculty pointed out that conversations can be richer on online discussion boards since students have more time to digest and reflect on complex content.

4. **Online learning allows some students to express themselves better than in-person sessions.** Some faculty noticed that students who tended to be quieter when the class was in-person felt more comfortable contributing to class discussions online. The breakout rooms feature in Zoom can be useful for splitting students into smaller groups, where each student has more opportunities to contribute and where quieter students might feel more comfortable speaking up during class. Additionally, the "chat box" feature in Zoom provides another opportunity for students to post questions or to share their thoughts on the class material with the professor and classmates. One professor described utilizing the "hand raise" feature in Zoom to make sure every student had a chance to participate. At the beginning of the class, all students had their hands raised and they took them down one-by-one as they had a chance to speak. This type of practice can ensure greater equity in terms of which students' voices are elevated in class discussions.

5. **Online learning technology can create opportunities for students to interact with one another.** In some cases, this can mean working with other students they might not choose to work with in class. For example, the random group discussion feature in Zoom can also be used to assign students to breakout rooms randomly, allowing students to work with different people each time. Additionally, the breakout rooms provide a space for students to interact with peers only, so they can think more freely about the topics and have conversations without the professor's presence.

## CONCLUSION

In this Practice Guide, we offer an overview of formative education online teaching practices gleaned from 38 faculty members across the 8 schools at Boston College. We have categorized the practices into three themes: 1) **Wholeness:** *Attending to Multiple Dimensions of Student Development;* 2) **Purpose:** *Connecting Coursework to Students' Experiences and Aspirations;* and 3) **Community:** *Fostering Relationships Within and Beyond the Classroom.* For each of these areas, effective practices are briefly explained in the main text above and are described in detail in the Appendix below, to illustrate some ways in which holistic, formative education can be sustained online in times of crisis. Many of these practices have been widely adopted by BC instructors, although some were more commonly used by faculty in specific disciplines and schools. All these pedagogical insights and strategies can be adjusted to suit an instructor's individual course design. With formative education goals in mind and practices at hand, faculty at Boston College can more effectively offer students education toward wholeness, purpose, and community, regardless of whether the class is in-person, online, or hybrid.

*Foster Social-Emotional Development (Practice 1)*

Fostering students' social-emotional development involves incorporating learning skills that are above and beyond the course content. Regardless of the course content, faculty can support students' social-emotional development by taking steps to build empathy and by modeling vulnerability.

> One English professor described how students were able to use poetry writing assignments to process their emotional experiences in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. A student in the class who spent the rest of the semester at home in New York City used the poem to write about "ambulances constantly racing by and going by some of the refrigerator trucks [holding bodies of people who had passed away from the virus]." In contrast, a number of students in the class expressed that they had felt very removed from the pandemic, as their hometowns were hardly affected by the virus. The professor used the Zoom breakout rooms as an opportunity for students to share their poems and collectively process their emotions. These sessions allowed students to make connections between their academic identities and personal lives.

**Suggestions to cultivate students' sense of academic purpose in your course:**

- » **Build a trustworthy classroom community.** Social-emotional learning requires students to establish trust not only with their professors, but also with their peers. To increase comfort levels within the classroom, a Philosophy professor encouraged small talk at the beginning of classes. For example, the professor sparked conversation by asking students questions like, "What's the best thing to eat in one of the dining halls on campus?". This type of small talk paved the way for students to have "riskier" conversations with one another. Online, the use of Zoom breakout rooms can also encourage students to share personal ideas or experiences that they may not feel inclined to disclose to the whole class. A Social Work professor emphasized that by creating a trustworthy environment, students are more likely to feel comfortable seeking help from a faculty member.

Moreover, part of building trust involves clear communication with students about what they do and don't feel comfortable sharing with the class. For instance, one Education professor described the usage of breakout rooms to elicit discussions on potentially sensitive topics, with an explicitly mutual understanding that students weren't expected to share the private conversations with the broader class upon reconvening. Similarly, a Theology professor mentioned making space in class for students to discuss challenges they were experiencing, without forcing anyone to unwilling share with others.

» **Explicitly acknowledge the emotional nature of students' lives.** Especially during times of considerable upheaval, it is important for faculty to acknowledge students' emotions. As one Philosophy professor said, "Acknowledging that our students are people who will have all kinds of fears and anxieties and that we are also people with fears and anxieties [is important]." One Biology professor also recognized a direct correlation between students' emotional states and their grades. Accordingly, when a grade dropped, the professor emphasized contacting students to see if they are okay: "I reached out in a 'Checking in on you. Exclamation point.' And just say, 'Hey, I'm here for you. Let me know what's going on.'"

» **Provide opportunities for students to be vulnerable.** Routinely checking in with students helps them to know that you view them as whole people. Multiple faculty members mentioned the "check-ins" that they would go through during synchronous class meetings. For example, one Sports Leadership professor asked students, "Can you give me a word about how you're feeling today everybody, and why?" Other faculty members asked students to share a "high" and "low" for the day or week. Students can also be vulnerable without saying a word. For example, a Biology professor described how students are often in tears when they hear cancer survivors share their stories, demonstrating vulnerability through their emotional reaction.

» **Model vulnerability.** Students can feel comfortable to share their feelings and emotions if you also allow yourself to be vulnerable in front of them. One Sports Leadership faculty member emphasized that it was important for students to know that "this is not easy for anybody, professors included. So, we're all in this together. Let's work together on this to make it the best experience possible." One Theology professor similarly said, "I think it's important for professors to try to sort of model what they want students to emulate. And so, I try in the classroom to model a sort of vulnerability."

» **Provide opportunities for students to bring their personal & emotional lives to their assignments.** As illustrated in the vignette above, creative writing projects and activities provide students with an accommodating platform for vulnerability. One Psychology professor noted that an integral part of learning is students' willingness to tell their own stories and attentively listen to the stories of their peers. Although some students may feel apprehensive about being transparent with their personal feelings and stories, within a safe classroom environment, it can foster great development.

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"To recognize that I don't know, per se, where my students are coming from. But I have to recognize that everyone is going to have their own journey. And to recognize and validate whatever they share with me, to understand it, empathize with them. And then to say, 'You know, we can do this together.' I can either give them resources at BC, use myself as a resource, connect people; there's this social interconnection that allows student formation."

— BIOLOGY PROFESSOR

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## *Foster Spiritual Development (Practice 2)*

As one Education professor noted, students sometimes enter the classroom thinking that they are not allowed to discuss their spiritual lives: "It's baked into our contemporary social psyches that we remove religion or spirituality from the intellectual." Regardless, students also bring their spiritual selves to the classroom, and faculty discussed multiple approaches to fostering spiritual growth. While spirituality is often used in a religious sense, spirituality can also include mindfulness or a general sense that we are part of something larger than ourselves.

A Philosophy professor showed students a documentary that compiled people's varied religious and spiritual perspectives on an issue: "The 'Problem of Suffering' is one of the clips I show. So, you have an atheist; you have an agnostic; you have a Buddhist; you have a Christian; you have a Jewish person. And they're saying like, this is how I think about that big question." Using this documentary as a foundation, the professor then asks students to share the understanding of their own spirituality. The professor emphasized the importance of ensuring that students feel comfortable engaging in the conversation: "I think it's really important to make sure everybody feels like they have a seat at the table. In other words, if you're an atheist, you have important things to say, meaningful things to say." Oftentimes, the professor has observed that students will find these discussions so engaging that they continue their conversations outside the classroom, providing further opportunities for spiritual growth.

**Suggestions to foster spiritual development in your course:**

» **Facilitate open discussions in the classroom about spirituality.** To encourage successful conversations, it is important that all students feel comfortable to share their ideas. This strategy is best illustrated in the example above, where the Philosophy professor used the documentary to showcase various religious beliefs before inviting students to share theirs.

» **Provide opportunities for mindfulness and contemplative practices.** There are multiple strategies that faculty can utilize to help students engage in mindful practices. First, faculty can start classes with meditation and breathing exercises or by playing a piece of music or reading poetry. These activities are usually incorporated to shift students' mental states as

they transition from their busy lives into the academic space. One English professor shared a way of connecting mindfulness activities to the course material. During a class on a Dickinson poem, the professor engaged students in an activity that allowed them to explore the "certain slant of light winter afternoons". Students were asked to "go out and just spend a minute or two kind of looking at the light, and then come back and talk about what is ineffable about it, what can't be communicated or what could be communicated."

Second, faculty can encourage students to spend their time outside of classes to engage in activities like yoga or walking, that require "unplugging" from technology.

Third, faculty can encourage students to engage in daily self-reflection exercises, where they reflect on their "highs" and "lows" for the day. This could potentially take place during class or on students' own time outside class.

» **Create space during office hours for students to discuss their spirituality.** By supporting students as whole people and welcoming open dialogue, faculty can be a resource for students who are contemplating their religion and spirituality. A Philosophy professor shared that a lot of his work involves students who come into office hours with reflections and questions like, "I was raised Catholic and it doesn't do anything for me now and I'm thinking about my spirituality. I was really interested in hearing what Buddhists think. What do you think of that?"

» **Integrate course material with service learning or other real-world experiences to contemplate spiritual questions.** One Philosophy professor observed that students often encounter great injustice in their service-learning courses. The professor noted: "What I'm doing helping them through that is thinking about, what do theologians say about the fact that the world has so much bad stuff in it?" The professor can use class readings to help students start answering these spiritual questions for themselves. Similarly, one Economics professor described encouraging students to think about the human connection of the material: "Whenever we were covering something [...] too cut and dry: 'these are just curves.' But there are people and livelihoods of people behind these curves. I stopped the class and I wanted the students to think about: what is the human connection? So, we use a little bit of that in the class, trying to make sure that they understand it. It's not just you know, 'All supply goes here, prices go up.' So, what is the consequence of that for real tangible human beings? The society that we are living in?"

» **Use writing assignments to help students reflect on spiritual issues.** Flexible assignment guidelines allow students to have freedom to focus on the spiritual topics that are important to them. Additionally, you can assign regular journal writing tasks in which students are

asked to answer reflective questions and prompts. For example, one Philosophy professor asks students to prepare a journal entry in response to the following: "What's your religious background and tell me anything you want to about that?" Many professors asked students to revisit assignments towards the end of the semester so students can experience the transformation of their thoughts and perspectives. A Theology professor says, "I find that oftentimes, the first pass at something is often the most superficial, least insightful. And so getting students to revisit the same thing from multiple perspectives over and over again [is helpful]". Similarly, an Education professor shares that final papers are "richer…deeper, and more nuanced. They're less afraid to tell a story about themselves that they certainly wouldn't have told at the beginning of the semester."

"But I really think my first job actually ends up being closer to formator in the sense of what I want them to do is to stop for a minute and for a year, and think about what is it that I really believe and think about things. And what do I want to believe and think about and how can I turn my attention to sort of foundational questions for my life? What do I believe relative to human community and human nature and the nature of God and Cosmos? What actually do I think this is all about?" — PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR

"St. Ignatius of Loyola, one of the focus points of his spirituality with the Jesuits was a practice of self-reflection. And he called it the examen. And so, it's a self-examen that Jesuits have to do every day. And anyone who tries to live Ignatian spirituality, does this form of self-examen, like how is God working in your life? What are the high points in my life right now? What were the low points in my day?" — EDUCATION PROFESSOR

## *Deepen Intellectual Development (Practice 3)*

Students' intellectual development is often seen as the primary goal of education, taking priority over other important dimensions of human flourishing including emotional, spiritual, and ethical aspects. Despite the seeming educational monopoly of students' 'intellectual' dimension, faculty members emphasized how the formative aspect of academic engagement can always be deepened. In this vein, faculty educators deliberately incorporated student-directed assignments into their courses this Spring, which encouraged students to take lead on their own learning. By having the flexibility to construct parts of their classroom experience, students were able to draw explicit connections between their course content (e.g. readings, authors/thinkers, topics or concepts) and their own personal interests.

An English professor gave students multiple options for their final projects. The original pre-pandemic final was intended to be a formal research paper, but in adjusting to various complications (e.g. greater difficulty in attaining library books and maintaining student energy), the professor gave students two alternative options: 1) record a dramatic monologue and create director's notes or 2) propose their own final project, with instructor approval. The professor found that students appreciated the flexibility in modality: "It was an opportunity to... do something that shook up their routine a little [...] I think for a lot of them, though, it at least made them feel good to know that they had an option if they wanted. That it wasn't so strict." Though not all students took the options that the professor provided, it was clear that students appreciated a classroom structure that was attentive to their interests and adapted to the changing learning environment.

**Suggestions to deepen intellectual development in your course:**

» **Provide multiple options or formats for students to demonstrate their learning.** This could include offering options between open-book or closed book exams, asynchronous and synchronous course structures, and varying dates for assignment deadlines. This practice was best illustrated in the vignette above from the English professor.

» **Allow students to choose their own topics for projects or papers, within the scope of the course.** This could include flexible prompts such as:

  • "Choose a new or emerging marketing tool or trend that influences marketing that either we have discussed in class (see list below) or that interests you that we have not covered

in class. You can also consider a key trend (such as sustainability, climate change, data privacy, or some other trend that interests you) that you think will significantly impact marketing in the next 5 years."

- "Imagine and design a future pilgrimage trip that you would like to take after the course is complete and social conditions allow its safe completion."

» **Create opportunities for students to take the lead in teaching a class or facilitating discussion.** You could design a rotating schedule where each student (or pairs or small groups of students) is responsible for leading one class each semester. Alternatively, you could ask students to develop critical, probing questions to guide class discussion, or urge students to lead the class lecture on a particular topic, issue, or concept.

For example, in a business course this Spring, one professor used contemporary American politics as a channel for student-led presentations. As several candidates were vying for the Democratic nomination for President during the Spring, the professor asked each student to research an issue proposed by a Democratic candidate and present their research to the class. In doing so, it "built community, where it was likely that [students] had more of a stake in the class. They were responsible for bringing [it] in." This classroom structure built students' investment into their intellectual and academic development.

» **Ask students to evaluate themselves and their peers on assignments and their progress towards course goals.** For example, one Education professor incorporates a formal self- and peer-evaluation into the structure of group projects. The evaluation is "not about who knew the most or who made the best presentation. It's about who is most attentive, who was most patient, who showed certain leadership skills that drew out students in that group that maybe were hesitant to participate." This kind of holistic assessment builds students' ability to recognize the role that group dynamics play in their intellectual development. Furthermore, self- and peer-evaluations help to build habits or recognitions of healthy intellectual progress after the course ends.

» **Challenge students to apply their coursework in "real-world" or beyond the classroom contexts.** This could include:

- Presenting to a local high school group
- Surveying members of the community about a topic
- Presenting a poster to a relevant professional community
- Collaborating with a relevant organization or agency to conduct a simulation

"I have them do like an open-ended research paper, so it can be on anything they want, as long as it's related to inequality. I think that really lets them kind of pick something that they care about. And I think that doing something you care about is the best way to get purpose, like you're kind of intrinsically motivated to care about this thing." — ECONOMICS PROFESSOR

"And ultimately, their project was to design some sort of response or intervention that demonstrated their own sense of control and agency in a situation that for many students, and many of us, felt very disempowering."
— PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR

*Encourage Students to Make Personal and Contextual Connections (Practice 4)*

Students come to the classroom with varying degrees of connections to the subject matter. Some may have deeply personal connections to the topic, while others may have professional connections. Other students may not even have any salient connections. Regardless, all students come into the classroom with life experiences. As one Philosophy professor noted, lived experiences can be analogous to a class lab component, where personal experiences can be drawn as evidence within the course.

> One Mathematics professor described relating the course content to the public health response to COVID-19. In particular, when the class was moved online, the professor "made a video about what flattening the curve means. [....] And that [it] actually relates to [the] area under the curves and rate curves in calculus." The professor noted that students seemed to respond very positively to the video, and it helped them appreciate "the fact that when we switched online, there was a reason we were switching to online. [...] And that math could be one way to help them understand that better."

**Suggestions to encourage students to make personal and contextual connections in your course:**

» **Incorporate content from current events into the lectures and class discussions.** A Social Work professor allocated time in class to discuss the systemic racism that Asian Americans were experiencing around the Coronavirus. Several professors mentioned meeting with students after the course formally ended to discuss the connection between current events and the course content. For example, a Nursing professor met with her students to debrief and discuss the intersection of George Floyd's death with COVID and students' experience as nursing students.

» **Allow students to choose assignment topics that are of interest to them.** For example, a Social Work professor described asking students to pick a topic "near and dear to their heart and apply it to the aging population."

» **Integrate students' personal contexts into the course.** This strategy can be especially important when your students are learning remotely and are not in the physical campus space. You can ask students to discuss or write about how the subject matter might manifest itself in their local contexts. For example, one Economics professor recounted how one group of students from New York focused their assignment on how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting

their community: "They were in New York; and they really dug into the local policies [...] and I was really impressed with the way they dug into understanding various aspects of their own community."

Additionally, you could invite students' family members to be a part of the learning experience. For instance, one Philosophy professor recalled that some students gave presentations to teach their siblings about the subject matter. Similarly, one Economics professor mentioned a student who had discussed the course material with their parents and brother at the dinner table.

» **Highlight classmates as experts to bring subject matter to life.** For instance, one Biology professor invited a series of experts in the field to guest lecture via Zoom. While most experts were medical professionals, one of the experts was a student in the class: "Her name is [Sarah] [...] And she had pediatric cancer. [...] It was such a beautiful talk. Her classmates were just shocked. Like she went through—she had a photographic journal of every single step of when she was in the hospital."

» **Develop discussion board prompts that explicitly ask students to make connections between the course content and their personal experiences.** One Education professor recounted designing discussion board prompts related to students' "experience in this isolated, COVID-post on-campus experience."

"I invited students to sort of make the whole COVID experience part of their reflection, you know, so a lot of the prophetic literature of the Bible was written during a time of crisis and upheaval. And so, it became a way, a lens, so the pandemic experience then became a way of engaging the course material in a new way." — THEOLOGY PROFESSOR

"Make connections or help the students to make the connections that we expect between the content and the reality. If you are teaching economics, maybe pick a case that has to do with racial inequality and make the connection. Yeah, the numbers tell us this, but how does that play out in real life? If you're teaching statistics, what about gender equality? I mean, like when I talk about connections, make the connections and use exercises, sort of strategies, that help us to do, that facilitate our students to make those connections." — SOCIAL WORK PROFESSOR

## *Model Whole-Person Engagement (Practice 5)*

Though formative education often focuses on holistic student development, many faculty members also emphasized the importance of whole teacher engagement. Formative education requires a dual focus on students and teachers, where both parties are challenged to engage all of their important dimensions in the classroom. When faculty members hold themselves to the same holistic standards as their students, that is when formation is most successful.

> Faculty can foster student development by acknowledging that faculty members are also still growing and learning. As one Philosophy professor noted:
>
> > *"When I talk about systematic racism, I will be very vulnerable and share about my own growth and like that, I'm not perfect and I'm still growing, this kind of thing so that the students can feel a kind of sense of safety and be able to talk."*
> > — PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR
>
> When students see their mentors and other authority figures making mistakes, this gives students space to take risks and learn from them.

**Suggestions to model whole-person engagement as an educator:**

» **Avoid compartmentalizing yourself as a teacher.** Though *student* formation is the ultimate goal of formative education, faculty members can only achieve this kind of holistic experience for students if they, themselves, practice bringing their whole selves to the classroom. One Philosophy professor described this practice as being in touch with your own humanity: "Something that is not good for formative education is thinking, 'My teacherly role is to stick to ideas and anytime I bring my person into the class, that's bad, because maybe I'm showing a bias or something.' But I think the opposite. I think a lot of formative education is being really human with our students." In other words, formative education requires that both teachers and students avoid segmenting their intellectual, social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

» **Be vulnerable and honest with your students.** If you seek to foster a personal kind of sharing and transparency amongst your students, it is important that you're willing to first share those kinds of experiences yourself. A Law professor described this as being willing to "show your heart:" teachers sometimes have to be willing to share their vulnerabilities first in order to set a precedent for the type of classroom they want to build. If you want students to discuss

systemic racism, you should share about your own growth in this area. If you want to discuss ethical dilemmas, you should be willing to share your own stance as well. Once you set that tone, "it gives [students] the space to kind of share in the same way."

» **Relinquish the idea of always being the "expert" in the classroom.** Use classroom structures that position you more as a colleague or peer, rather than as the stereotypical teacher with all of the knowledge. For example, one English faculty member deliberately asked their students for help navigating various technological aspects of her course. The professor found that acknowledging their students' expertise in this aspect helped to break down the typical barriers between the instructor and students.

» **Hold yourself to the same standards as your students.** Many faculty members described the importance of communicating clear expectations with their students as they shifted their courses online. However, educators also emphasized the importance of holding themselves accountable to the same standards. As one Law professor noted, he told his students that "in order for you to learn well in this environment, I expect the following things of myself and of you." These included very tangible expectations such as being on time for class, preparing for class adequately, keeping on the camera, and dressing in business casual attire. These ideas were shared by faculty in disciplines of Economics, Business, and Education.

*Cultivate Students' Sense of Civic Purpose (Practice 6)*

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the welfare of individuals worldwide and led to the exacerbation of social and racial inequalities. Simultaneously, the nation experienced police-based racial discrimination which engendered civil unrest. All against the backdrop of an upcoming election, the population has also become more politically active and engaged. As a professor of Theology explained, in any learning environment, "Students need to be active consumers of what they're being taught and think carefully about the contexts in which the teaching is happening. [...] Nothing happens without a context or in a vacuum." This unprecedented time has heightened the necessity to provide students with language, perspectives, and approaches that allow them to comprehend the situation, express their opinions, and effectively participate as full members of society.

In his course, an Economics professor shared empirical data that clearly represented social inequality. Through the course discussion, he guided students to understand the social implications behind the data by talking about how "these inequalities have consequences for people." As he describes, the numbers show a trend, but they also represent a reality where "people are making less money; they lost a job; they don't have health insurance; they're more likely to get sick." This type of practice contextualizes course material and humanizes the way students analyze information. These skills translate in society as ways for students to engage with current events.

In the English department, another professor addressed and emphasized relevant topics even if they weren't directly part of the syllabus. In a section about slam poetry, one student in the class expressed interest in poetry written by "Black Panther associated people." As the professor noted, a slam poetry section cannot avoid conversations about race, and for this specific student, the professor recognized a necessity for further learning. The student who initially stated that she didn't know about the history was recommended to read a book about the Black Panthers. The student came back a few weeks later having read the book and expressed frustration regarding the ongoing George Floyd protests: "The same problems the Black Panthers were trying to deal with and things that they were explaining remain a problem now and I don't know how we're gonna find a way forward." The book recommendation gave the student a history to understand the current society and helped the student to feel politically motivated.

**Suggestions for developing students' sense of civic purpose:**

» **Integrate multiple avenues to encourage students' reflection and engagement with social issues.** Aside from creating a safe environment to foster reflection and engagement during synchronous sessions, many professors also made an effort to continue the conversation outside of class hours. A Social Work professor sent emails to students in immediate response to current events and issues as they happened. In the emails, she would recognize, acknowledge, and talk about the issues. When they next met for a synchronous session, the professor made sure to follow up on the email. This was a way for her to communicate to her students that the current issues are important, and that students are more than welcome to discuss them during class time, even if it may not be directly related to the course material. Another professor held weekly meetings even after the semester ended to have meaningful discussions about race, since all students in her class identified as people of color. She facilitated discussion about racial identities, "the anti-Blackness within our own cultures," and interrogated what it means to be a person of color at BC and in the country.

» **Review case studies to bring in different perspectives and hypothetical situations for students to grapple with subject matter.** Aside from traditional case studies, many professors included articles/videos of current events, documentaries, and podcasts as part of their "reading" list. In a business course, a professor asked students to read case studies and think about what they would do if they were in the described situation. A Law School professor integrated a video on the Varsity Blues case to facilitate a discussion on "what the correct punishment should be." While engaging students' "moral and spiritual sense of what is right and wrong," the case study allowed students to bridge course content and practice.

» **Encourage students to engage with current events.** A professor of Economics incorporated this practice into his syllabus by asking students to "find a news article that was published that week and connect to the subject material of the chapter that we covered that week." For example, during the week that covered the topic of unemployment, some students found a news article in the *New York Times* on unemployment in Korea. Students summarized the article and connected it to economic models covered in class. Other professors invited students to share relevant news stories during class time, or to contribute to a shared Google Doc compilation of news articles. A professor from the School of Education also taught her students some "life skills around how to be selective around the information that they were gathering and processing and then how to process that information." This allowed students to become global citizens who know how to be agents of their actions and thoughts.

» **Create assignments that give students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences within the current context.** One professor who taught a course in leadership decided to repurpose an assignment so students could write about "how they would lead in a period of crisis and what they've learned from COVID." This kind of assignment gave students an authentic purpose to apply course content to the real world. In another course, a Philosophy professor assigned a paper asking students to reflect on "how COVID particularly affects the communities they served." This allowed students to understand the situation from another perspective.

» **Be intentional about the texts that your students will read.** Many professors made changes to their reading lists so that assigned texts were more relevant to the current social context. One professor of Philosophy replaced some existing readings with texts like Martin Luther's essay on whether to flee a deadly plague. She said, "I never in my life thought I would teach [this] in any course, but it has lots of really interesting things relevant to politics today." The unprecedented global experience allows professors to bring new perspectives to their syllabus. Even if you retain the same reading list, there are ways of approaching them from a different perspective in light of the social climate. A Theology professor explained that "a lot of prophetic literature of the Bible was written during a time of crisis and upheaval." In relation to the current times, "the pandemic experience became a lens of engaging course material in a new way. Outside of assigned readings, an English professor encouraged inquiry by recommending relevant books to students who were grappling with questions on social, political, and racial issues.

## Cultivate Students' Sense of Vocational Purpose (Practice 7)

Students first come to campus with varying degrees of vocational goals. Some students will know the exact profession they want to pursue, while the larger majority seek to explore vocational options within their areas of interest. For either type of students, courses are an opportunity to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to prepare them for their future careers. It should also be an opportunity to introduce students to an array of vocational possibilities.

For instance, one Psychology professor described a mentoring program that she developed with her son and her students during the pandemic. The program involved a tiered mentoring approach in which Boston College students mentored high school students via Zoom, who then mentored middle school students via Zoom. The program provided students an opportunity to practice being a role model for their younger peers:

> *"And we just saw these BC students rise up and decided that they were going to take this on, conceptualize the program, quickly recruit and train up high school students, mentor them so closely, so lovingly that these high school students caught a picture of what it means to care for somebody who doesn't even know you. And they then, based on what they learned in their role modeling experiences with these college students, then delivered it beautifully to the community."*
>
> — PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR

**Suggestions for developing students' sense of vocational purpose:**

» **Encourage students to think like professionals in their field.** Professors expressed the importance of fostering certain values besides domain-specific skills. For example, being broad-minded and open to new ideas. An Economics professor has students who mostly entered the field so they could go into consulting or investment banking. In his class, he reminds students that there are ways of applying economics outside of businesses and financial markets. He challenges students to think about how economics can be used to understand education and health policy, or how it can be used to help low-income people. With regards to the work and school environment that abruptly turned virtual, a couple professors reminded their students that the context-specific skills for the virtual environment will also be a useful skill to apply in future professions.

» **Invite students to simulate professionals in their fields.** A Business School professor organized a "multi-day group simulation where students are tasked as the Chief Marketing Officer of a company and they have to make nine periods of decisions." As a group, the students in the class analyzed data by applying tools and approaches covered in the course. A professor of Social Work engaged her students to prepare a poster presentation for a conference representative of the field. Although the pandemic cancelled the conference, students still did a virtual presentation of their poster to their classmates.

» **Share experiences from a professional standpoint.** Professors with vocational experience outside of teaching shared anecdotes during lectures to connect course material with careers. A Law School professor said he sometimes talks to students from a career perspective in order to appeal to their broader life goals.

» **Introduce students to authentic tools and resources used by professionals in the real world.** An Economics professor introduced publicly available census data and asked students to analyze the inequality in their own zip code. Similarly, a professor from the school of education "required students to go on some websites that are meant to be resources for them" to use going forward in their future careers as instructors. The incorporation of authentic resources from the real-world is another way for students to envision a career within the field.

## *Cultivate Students' Sense of Academic Purpose (Practice 8)*

Students come to class at varying points along their academic journey at Boston College. Some undergraduate students might be thinking about their choice of major(s), while others are considering whether they would like to pursue graduate or professional studies. Moreover, there are graduate students at Boston College who are trying to develop their thesis or dissertation topics, as well as their role as a scholar in their chosen field.

One strategy faculty can use to foster students' sense of academic purpose is providing book recommendations to students that align with their academic interests. For instance, an English professor described a student who wrote a paper on "The Revolution will not be Televised" which is a poem and song by Gil Scott-Heron. In response to the student's interests, the professor recommended a Black Panthers book. In another instance, this same professor recalled mentioning a book in class by Lee Edelman. One of the students in the class really took an interest in the book and came to office hours to discuss it further: "And she came into office hours, and she was like, 'Oh, I want to talk about this book.' And she had it with her and she had it all like marked up. I'm like, oh, wow, she really like went and did the work!" Thus, this professor was able to help students further explore the interests they expressed in class on the way to better understanding their academic purpose.

**Suggestions to cultivate students' sense of academic purpose in your course:**

» **Engage in formal and informal academic advising and mentoring relationships with students.** For example, while students might come to office hours with a specific question about academic content, you can create space for students to discuss their academic interests and goals more broadly. One Philosophy professor emphasized the importance of really listening to students and offering them new ideas to consider as they make choices about their majors. Part of this advising work can also involve encouraging students to engage in independent study to explore their interests above and beyond what has been assigned in class.

» **Help students make connections between the content and their academic goals.** For example, in some cases the content of your course can spark new academic interests. One Economics professor noted that students might switch to an Economics major after realizing that the content learned in the major can help them address critical issues like income inequality.

Similarly, one English professor described how literature "can possibly crack open the way that students imagine themselves or the way they imagined their future." In some cases, this can result in a change of major to something more aligned with students' new understanding about the future. A Philosophy professor also described how exposing students to new texts and issues they had not previously had an opportunity to learn about before can lead them "to even change their majors, change the course of their lives."

» **Help students refine their academic goals by interacting with professionals in their field and related fields.** One Mathematics professor asks students to interview a faculty member in another department about how the math content connects to their work. This provides students an opportunity to better understand how math is utilized in other academic fields, like Chemistry. Another strategy used by a Biology professor is inviting guest lectures who are experts on the content being covered in class. This provides students an opportunity to envision how a Biology major can transcend to various career options.

» **Provide students opportunities to learn from one another.** One professor described the experience of two students, in particular, really taking an interest in the topic material and learning from one another in discussion board conversations: "I saw them discovering new readings, new scholars whose work they wanted to pursue, new ways of looking at the questions that interested them."

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"And I think what I want to give them is an interest in maybe their purpose is actually going to be to go into a job where they change some of these things or to pick a major where they feel a purpose, like economics, where that major can lead them to do something that gives them purpose. So that it addresses inequality. I want to give them a sense to like what they're learning could have helped them impact the world positively. Kind of guide them towards learning things that I think are useful for them." — ECONOMICS PROFESSOR

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"I had a student in one of my classes who became a Sociology major because she felt like you know, all of a sudden this opened up for her that she hadn't even known was possible and she went forward through her education feeling like she had a better sense of who she wanted to be." — ENGLISH PROFESSOR

"I do a lot in office hours of asking students to just share about themselves. I've done a lot of guidance for students who say things like, 'Oh, you know what? I hate my accounting classes.' Or, 'I love my accounting classes.' [...] So I think there's a lot of listening. I think listening is a really important skill." — PHIOSOPHY PROFESSOR

## *Cultivate Students' Sense of Spiritual Purpose (Practice 9)*

Spiritual purpose involves students' sense of what they are being called upon to do from either their God or some larger sense of what humanity is calling them to do, or in the words of one Theology professor: "What does God want you to do? What are you good at? What do people need to have you do?" Boston College students enter the classroom with diverse religious and spiritual beliefs and ideas about how their spirituality affects their lives. Faculty can help students develop their spiritual sense of purpose through a variety of classroom strategies.

One Education professor's class covered faith development after moving online. Specifically, the professor had collaborated with a graduate student to create a faith development map exercise. Before class students were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- What were key moments/belief systems for you? (include upbringing)

- What questions were you asking?

- Who were the people who helped or hindered you?

- Were/are they given authority or chosen authority?

- What was helpful? What hindered you?

Using their responses to these prompts, students were asked to develop a map of their faith development which could be a visual, bullet list, or narrative text. When students came together for the synchronous session, they had an opportunity to discuss their maps with one another. In some cases, the faith development content and activities provided an opportunity for students to reflect on and revisit some of their childhood experiences around religion and spirituality:

> *"I had some students talk about how they had kind of just cut off any thought about faith, because they couldn't go ahead with the faith that they had been handed as a child, and that the experience of reading about faith development showed them that actually you can change the way that you make meaning of ultimate meaning and for some students they said this would reopen a discussion that they thought—or a dimension of themselves—that they thought they had left behind."* — EDUCATION PROFESSOR

Furthermore, since the students in the class were also educators, the faith development work they completed in class would also impact their interactions with students: "Some of the students said that it would cause them to [...] be more open to the students they work with, raising issues that touched on meaning and purpose."

**Suggestions for cultivating students' sense of spiritual purpose into your course structure:**

» **Encourage students to engage in self-reflection.** This self-reflection can come in a variety of forms such as yoga or other activities where they can engage in quiet thought alone or with others. For example, one Theology professor suggested that students can do yoga together via Zoom.

» **Incorporate written assignments that allow students to reflect on their spiritual beliefs.** One approach to eliciting students' sense of their spiritual purpose is to ask them how they want to be remembered. One Leadership and Administration professor asks students to write their own obituary: "You died in your sleep at 103 years old. How will you be remembered? What will they say about you when you're gone?" This type of assignment provides students an opportunity to reflect upon the type of person they want to be. In another instance, one Theology professor gives students considerable freedom to tackle deep theological and philosophical questions of interest to them. For example, students can consider such questions as "Which religion should I believe in?" and "Is one religion true, or are they all true?"

» **Ask students to revisit critical questions on multiple occasions throughout the semester.** For example, at the beginning of the semester one Theology professor asks her students to describe their understanding of religious education. At the end of the semester, they revisit this same question, in light of their learning and development in the course: "Asking them repeatedly, 'What does that mean for you? What does it mean for you in your life, your understanding of yourself, and how you think of yourself?' That's at the heart of it. It's a continual asking them to reflect on this in terms of their sense of purpose."

» **Provide opportunities for students to consider the spiritual aspects of their future vocations.** For instance, one Biology professor described helping students, many of whom had career aspirations in the medical field, to consider how they would engage with the humanity of their future patients: "So that spiritual growth is understanding the interpersonal relationship and understanding the empathy that you need to go through like to see a person who is sick, to see a doctor who sees people who are sick all the time, and to understand what that is." Regardless of students' chosen major or profession, it is important that they understand the human connection of their work.

"Part of it [purpose] is some kind of sense of self direction or other direction. [...] They may feel like God has a purpose for them and they need to find that out and live into it. So there's directionality there. Or a student could say, 'I'm creating my purpose' or 'I'm discovering what I think my purpose is' and not necessarily have a reference point for any kind of divinity. That's one side of purpose. But for me, another point of purpose, connects the individual with the community. And try to see that purpose is never just about oneself, but it's always about one's relationship to others." — THEOLOGY PROFESSOR

"So, when I think about purpose, it's about anchoring your life and thinking about your life in terms of something transcendent, and I mean, transcendent in the biggest sense not necessarily God, but community, society. You know, something that anchors your life and meaning." — PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR

## *Build Classroom Community (Practice 10)*

Building a classroom community is ever more important during these unsettling times. It is especially important when classes are held in an online setting. In an effort to build a strong classroom community, faculty designed the course delivery to ensure a feeling of social presence. Faculty created an environment for learners to express their ideas, ask questions, and contribute to the community. Further, faculty themselves brought their ability to project themselves both socially and emotionally. Thus, fostering student-student engagement and student-teacher engagement served as useful strategies for building a classroom community.

> For instance, opportunities for student-student engagement often came in the form of collaborative group work. Indeed, one Philosophy professor believed that group work was especially important in building classroom community. Having students work on a group project allowed them to share their learning and knowledge with each other, provide feedback, and incorporate those feedback. This process of sharing knowledge and learning from each other, according to the Philosophy professor, helped them "build community, just so that they would continue to share with one another. Because the essence of that course is deep sharing."

**Suggestions for building a classroom community:**

» **Take advantage of technology tools.** Online teaching and learning can be an opportunity for faculty to be creative with technology. For example, use of the breakout rooms feature in Zoom and breaking students up into smaller groups provides a more comfortable environment for students to engage and build connections with one another. Another advantage of the use of breakout rooms is that it allows students to step out of their comfort zone. Oftentimes, in an in-person classroom setting, students are likely to engage with a select group of other students that they are comfortable with and continue engaging with that group. Using breakout rooms and randomly assigning students into different groups allows students to resist forming 'cliques' and "expand their [students'] horizons...to find people that will challenge them, to find people to see that there are other people that think slightly different than their friends," as one professor from the School of Social Work notes. Use of a discussion board on Canvas can ignite and prime the discussion in advance. As one faculty member notes, a combination of the Zoom discussion breakout sessions with discussion board conversation online helped facilitate class participation.

» **Incorporate group projects.** Similar to an in-person classroom environment, incorporating group projects and having students learn to work and collaborate can help foster a strong bond among students. Though challenges that are unique to an online learning environment are present, that is not to say that group projects in an online setting are impossible. From creating a shared Google Doc to brainstorm ideas to dividing up the work among peers, there are technology and tools available to help make it a great learning experience.

» **Hold one-on-one meetings as a general check-in, beyond the course or subject matter.** This practice ensures that students feel connected to teachers, promotes a sense of connectedness, and fosters a sense of community, even in a remote, online setting. Whether it's just as simple as checking in to see how they are doing, both academically as well as emotionally, with many transitions and changes happening, faculty reaching out to students invites students to open up and feel a sense of community within the class.

» **Be flexible and accommodate students' needs.** This approach could include being flexible with office hours, beyond the standard hours, especially for those students who are in different time zones. Beyond having flexible office hours, some faculty incorporated asynchronous components with the shift to an online environment. For example, one Philosophy faculty member recorded lecture videos and posted them beforehand in order to help ensure that students don't miss important class content as well as to help start a rich discussion in zoom. As she notes, "So that way, you know, everyone is really close to being on the same page, no matter where you are, what sort of thing is happening."

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"I felt like I did a lot of individualized checking in with people more than normal, because it's so easy to feel like you're not really there. And so, I think students needed a lot of like, 'Oh, I saw your camera was off' or 'I saw you weren't in class today, what was going on?' Not in a like, punitive way, but just to like, 'I do know you're there. You're not invisible.' " — ENGLISH PROFESSOR

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## *Build Professional Community (Practice 11)*

Building a sense of community is another way for students to navigate their vocational purpose. The Boston College community and faculty members have strong networks with professionals across the globe, and courses are one space to introduce and develop those connections. Now in a largely virtual learning environment, the possibilities have opened up for students to network across geographic boundaries.

> For instance, one Theology professor invited students to attend a panel of School of Theology Deans from three universities including Boston College. The panel was about the impact of COVID from the perspective of theology, and it was a way for students to "participate in a larger conversation outside of our little Catholic bubble at the STM." This opportunity allows students to envision themselves as part of a larger professional network.

**Suggestions for building professional community:**

» **Organize a panel of professionals, experts, and alumni to bring in multiple perspectives into the class.** Similar to the Theology professor who invited students to a panel of School of Theology Deans in the vignette above, one Social Work professor organized a panel of professionals in the area to talk about the effect that the pandemic has had on certain agencies, current job opportunities, and prospects for students in the current job market. Specifically designed for her students who were about to graduate from the program, this was a chance for them to understand the current situation and ask relevant questions: "I did a panel for students who were graduating with professionals in the area of aging to talk about what's going on in their agencies with Corona, what are the job opportunities, what are their people doing, what are prospects for students on job market, and a chance to ask questions."

» **Host guest lectures with experts of the field.** A Biology professor has been inviting three to six biology-related experts each semester to speak with her classes about their careers. Examples of past speakers include CEOs of pharmaceutical companies, MDs, pediatric oncologists, breast oncologists, and surgeons. She explains that these lectures are designed to give students a "global 360 perspective," and to reinforce that "being a biology major doesn't mean I'm going to be a doctor." As the course shifted to the online context, these lectures were hosted on Zoom.

» **Create assignments that ask students to interview experts and role models.** Interviews with experts gave students an opportunity to have meaningful conversations and hear new perspectives. A Social Work professor had her students talk to somebody at an agency to hear more about what the agency does in more depth. A Mathematics professor gave students the option to interview a professor from another department to hear about how calculus applies to their field. For example, through an interview with a Chemistry professor, students could understand that the "trajectory of people in a field is not linear."

*Facilitate Connections with the Broader Community (Practice 12)*

Building a sense of community can extend beyond a classroom setting. Whether by making connections and engaging with organizations through inviting guest lecturers, going on virtual museum field trips, or engaging with family members, building connections with the broader community instills students' learning experience beyond the subject matter. Facilitating connections with the broader community, thus, is one of important mechanisms by which students from diverse backgrounds and experiences contribute to a richer learning experience.

As one faculty member highlights, facilitating connections with the broader community when learning shifted to online provided one advantage of being able to invite people from different time zones, from the west coast as well as from another country, even. In retrospect, this Social Work professor believes that the panel that she brought together for the class wouldn't have been as rich if class was held in-person.

**Suggestions for facilitating connections with the broader community:**

» **Incorporate teaching materials and take it beyond the classroom context.** As part of the class, a Philosophy professor planned to take the class to the Walden Pond. Due to COVID-19, this could not happen, and instead, the professor revised the agenda and had students either read a section of Walden while outside or take on other creative ways themselves with the topic matter. To the professor's surprise, students took on creativity and went above and beyond with the assignment, and one student even edited and created a video of him walking over the snow, for example.

» **Be creative in connecting with the broader community.** Facilitating connections with the broader community can take place in a home setting. For example, when most students returned home during the Spring semester due to COVID-19, faculty took on creative ways to incorporate class content to the broader community by having students give presentations to their siblings and other family members to teach about the subject matter.

» **Connect students to professionals in the field.** Whether through inviting professionals and alumni to class, or through having assignments where students can have an opportunity to interview professionals in the field, this can not only help students gain a broader understanding of the learning material but can also help students gain a clearer sense of goals and trajectories beyond the course.

## Communicate Clear Expectations (Practice 13a)

Faculty members emphasized the importance of clearly and explicitly communicating their expectations for class sessions and coursework to students throughout the semester.

A Biology professor found it effective to regularly communicate with all members of the class:

> *"I wanted to make sure twice a week, I touched base as a whole. Here's a problem set for you. This is how the exam format's going to be, keeping everybody knowing what the next step was. I didn't want anybody to be in the dark and guessing about what's going to happen."* — BIOLOGY PROFESSOR

Keeping students updated as each week unfolded helped allay students' stress while navigating the new context of remote instruction. It also provided structure and prompts to help students stay prepared. For example, when an exam was coming up, the professor asked the course TA to write out a detailed email explaining the steps that students would need to take in order to complete an exam online and prompting them to be prepared so that the logistics of the exam wouldn't become a barrier to their success.

Structure and consistency were key for one professor in the School of Theology and Ministry:

> *"For me, I find that when I'm teaching online, I tend to keep a consistent structure so that [my students] don't get lost in the process of 'Now we're going to do this model. Now we're going to do this model. Now we're going to use this technology. Now we're going to use that technology.'"* —THEOLOGY PROFESSOR

Instead of trying to incorporate many external tools and technologies, this professor chose a few tools to master and focused on ensuring students knew how to use the tools effectively. Having a clear course structure laid out in the syllabus with consistent elements also helped the students to get into the flow of the course and to know what to expect: "Be sure the way you set up your course is redundantly clear. You want students to within a couple of weeks have the rhythm of the class."

**Suggestions for communicating clear expectations:**

» **Clearly communicate course learning goals and explicitly connect goals to each lesson.** Professors felt this was important to help students see the value of the course and to make it more meaningful for them, as well as to help students see how the course content connected to their lives and experiences. Faculty might do this by including relevant course goals in the directions for assignments or asking students to self-assess their progress towards course goals.

» **Swiftly communicate course updates and provide students feedback.** Faculty emphasized the importance of immediately communicating updates to the course structure or content. Consistent feedback and a short turnaround time for grades kept students engaged with their course progress and ensured that there was no question about their academic standing within the course. Several professors felt this was especially important in helping students to make a decision about whether to take the course pass/fail in the spring and held themselves to the standard of providing feedback within two to three days.

» **Set a routine for each class that includes some predictable elements.** Professors found it helpful to start class by having students respond to a prompt in the Zoom chat box as they entered class or to get a quick one-sentence verbal check-in from each student to gauge students' thoughts and emotions. Others used a structured PowerPoint presentation or a regular small group discussion as part of every class session, and many professors reported sharing an agenda at the beginning of each class meeting so that students would know what to expect.

» **Communicate expectations for how students should use Zoom.** Professors shared their policies on whether students should turn on their videos during class sessions and how students should participate in discussions using the options available on the Zoom platform (raise hand feature, unmute and speak, submit questions through the chat box, etc.). One professor explicitly asked students to use the "gallery view" display on Zoom rather than the "speaker view" display so that the students could all see each other throughout class meetings. Another professor asked students to dress in business casual attire during presentations to simulate a professional environment. Providing this guidance helped students to navigate the online learning environment and let them know how to participate more effectively in the remote classroom.

» **Provide clear and detailed directions for every assignment, no matter how small.** For discussion board posts, professors provided instructions on how often students should

post, including responses to their peers, and the due date for each post or response. They also clearly stated the purpose of discussion board posts and word limits, as applicable. For longer or more high-stakes assignments, faculty members often provided examples of strong assignments to help guide students in their work. One professor provided examples of both "A" and "B" quality work so that students could get a better idea of the academic expectations for the course.

» **Set expectations for group work.** This approach includes explicitly telling students when they could work together on homework or problem sets or defining what each member of a group should contribute in a group project. In Zoom breakout discussions, this also meant describing in detail what the group's product should be at the end of the discussion: a Google slide that they would share with the class, a verbal summary of the small group discussion, or some other shared element. One faculty member also found it helpful to identify roles for group members in the discussion, such as facilitator, reporter, and scribe, to provide the group with more focus and structure.

*Ensure Equitable Access to Course Resources & Support (Practice 13b)*

With students scattered across the country, and sometimes the globe, faculty members took additional steps to ensure that all of their students still had access to course materials and to a system of support. This included making use of online tools and technologies available through Boston College as well as changing the context or structure of course elements.

A School of Management professor found the "flipped" classroom approach to be very effective after the switch to remote learning:

> *"[B]efore they canceled class in person, I strive for about 50% lecture 50% discussion. And then, once they made the announcement that we're going online, I tried to flip the classroom. I recorded my lectures outside and had them watch them in advance of the class meetings. So then, when we met, I could have some prepared discussion questions that they could already have responses to, and we could be able to hit the ground running during those meetings, rather than spend time online lecturing."*
> — BUSINESS PROFESSOR

As part of the flipped classroom model, the professor broke lectures down into smaller pieces, with each video lasting no more than six minutes. This made the content more readily accessible for students to watch at their convenience, but it also helped the professor to maintain a high level of energy throughout the videos, making them more engaging for students to watch.

Rather than try to find a way to ensure students were not using outside materials on an exam, a Biology professor took the opposite approach and allowed students to take open-book exams. This was one way to try to create a more equal playing field in the resources available to students:

> *"I made each exam and quiz open notebook, open Internet, open, you can talk to whoever you want to talk to, because I wanted to keep a level playing field. I wanted to make sure that I don't have one student at home who has the advantage of having three computers and you know, a mom or dad who just did a PhD... next to them. And then I have another student who can't even get the internet to work, and I needed to make sure there was some type of equity that I could promote in the classroom."* — BIOLOGY PROFESSOR

The professor found that this approach didn't lead to grade inflation; the exam average for the class remained the same on the open-book exam as it had on earlier

exams taken in class. "[W]hen we build exams, it doesn't matter how many resources you have in front of you, you have to have this conceptual understanding of the material and be able to apply it."

**Suggestions for ensuring equitable access to course resources and support:**

» **Have students practice using technology platforms.** One professor ran a test session with his class to ensure that everyone knew how to use Zoom and was able to log in.

» **Provide multiple opportunities for students to connect with instructors.** Multiple faculty members recommended holding additional office hours and providing additional opportunities and times for students to connect with instructors, including individual and group office hours or study groups. One professor had the course TA hold study groups in the evening so that students with family responsibilities during the day or students who lived in different time zones still had the opportunity to connect with a group of their peers to discuss the course content.

» **Incorporate asynchronous elements into the course.** Since students may be joining class from multiple time zones, asynchronous components enable students to participate at convenient times. Faculty can use available online tools (Perusall, Canvas discussion boards, Google Doc assignments) to allow students to engage with one another at their convenience.

» **"Flip" the classroom.** Faculty recommended recording lectures and posting them online for students to view prior to a class meeting, and then using the class meeting for discussion and deeper engagement with the material. Professors reported that students appreciated this method because they wanted to engage with one another in discussing the course content, and they were also able to stop and re-watch lecture videos as needed to better understand the course content.

» **Implement accessible exam policies.** Faculty can make exams more accessible by allowing students to take them at different times or having an open note/book policy so that all students can use the same resources. One professor provided students with an optional Zoom link to take exams 'together' and ask her questions as needed. Another professor proctored exams by Zoom and offered students in different time zones the opportunity to take exams in the morning or later at night, outside of the normal class period, which allowed them to have a similar experience to their peers.

## *Incorporate Student Feedback (Practice 13c)*

Faculty members reported regularly soliciting feedback from students on the course structure, content, and workload, and then making adjustments tailored to the needs of the class as a whole. This increased students' ownership of their learning while also demonstrating that faculty members were invested in their students' well-being.

One Economics professor polled students after everyone left campus to ask for feedback on the course structure and content:

> *"I gave a poll to my students and I basically gave them the option do they want me to sort of continue with the syllabus more or less as is, or I gave them the option that we would throw the syllabus away and do group research projects on COVID."*
> — ECONOMICS PROFESSOR

Students voted for research projects, and the professor then polled them on their topics of interest and used those topics to create groups:

> *"I had one group of students that was doing epidemiology of [COVID-19] and kind of modeling different scenarios that could happen. I had a couple of groups that ended up doing comparisons across countries and looking at different policy responses and what happened in different countries based on those policy responses. [...] I had a group do something on the politics of COVID. I had a group that looked specifically at what was happening in New York from a variety of perspectives."* — ECONOMICS PROFESSOR

As a result, the students engaged deeply with the project and used it as a framework for demonstrating their understanding of the course material, becoming experts in a particular area of focus.

A professor in the Philosophy department used student feedback after the switch to remote learning to help build out the course in the online environment:

> *"I'd say, 'Okay, go take this quiz.' And they'd come back, and they would tell me, 'Well, this question was unclear. You didn't give us enough time for this.' And I was saying, 'Okay, I won't count that quiz. I'm just learning how to do these.' So, we had a great back and forth on that."* — PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR

By using student feedback, the professor was able to determine what was reasonable for students to accomplish remotely while at the same time building a sense of community that the whole class was a team in the online learning process:

> *"The first written exam was a timed written exam, that I totally underestimated how much time it would take. So, they came back and told me they couldn't get through it all. And so, we negotiated that, and I adjusted the grades on that. And then the next test, they were like, 'Okay, that was right. You got it.' And then we did oral exams, which we hadn't done, and it was terrific. And they like those. So, we were learning together. It was great."* — PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR

This engagement of students led to a more collaborative assessment process.

**Suggestions for incorporating student feedback into your course structure:**

» **Validate students' course goals.** For instance, faculty can ask students what their goals are for the course and how faculty can best support them in reaching those goals. Have students self-assess their progress towards their course goals and provide a space, such as a reflective assignment or small group discussions, for students to make suggestions as to how the course could better support their learning.

» **Collect anonymous student feedback.** After each class faculty can solicit feedback anonymously via a survey or exit ticket and address the feedback in the next class. Professors used this strategy to check students' understanding of course material and to dedicate additional time to difficult material, or to adjust the structure of the class. Professors who surveyed their students on course structure found their students to be pretty honest, and made course adjustments that included: shortening the posted lecture videos, incorporating more low-stakes weekly assignments rather than having a final exam, or having more small-group discussions rather than whole-class discussions.

» **Solicit students' questions before class.** Faculty can ask students to submit questions prior to class and incorporate the questions into class discussions. This allowed students to shape the class discussion after taking the time to reflect on the readings and lecture videos, and it also gave more introverted students an avenue to participate.

» **Have students peer review assignments.** Prior to submitting their final assignments, students were able to give each other productive feedback that strengthened assignments and

encouraged students to consider multiple perspectives. This approach also builds a structure for peer engagement and community building.

» **Use online platforms that appeal to students.** Faculty can ask students which online platforms they use regularly and incorporate the use of platforms that are popular with students, such as Instagram live. One professor found that student participation rates in optional sessions soared after the professor started using Instagram live to host meetings based on student feedback.

» **Regularly consult small groups of students for course feedback.** This could include having Teaching Assistants solicit weekly feedback from discussion groups or asking students who regularly attend group office hours to provide suggestions on the course's direction.

This Practice Guide is based on insights gleaned from 38 Boston College faculty members across all eight schools/colleges. This qualitative research study employs multiple case study methodology using faculty interview data, course artifacts (e.g., assignments, class activities, asynchronous lecture videos, and synchronous class recordings), and course evaluations (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2009). The Dean of the School of Education and Human Development asked the Dean of each school/college to nominate faculty members who successfully transitioned to providing formative or whole-person education in the online environment. Nominated faculty were invited by the Dean of the School of Education to participate in the study. These faculty members taught at least one undergraduate and/or graduate-level course in spring 2020.[2]

**TABLE 1** | Count and Percentage of Participants by School

| SCHOOL | COUNT | PERCENTAGE |
|---|---|---|
| Carroll School of Management | 4 | 11% |
| Law | 3 | 8% |
| Lynch School | 4 | 11% |
| MCAS | 17 | 45% |
| Nursing | 1 | 3% |
| School of Theology & Ministry | 5 | 13% |
| Social Work | 2 | 5% |
| Woods College | 2 | 5% |
| **GRAND TOTAL** | **38** | **100%** |

One-on-one interviews with faculty served as the primary data source for the Practice Guide. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to gather information about faculty's experience teaching online this past spring 2020. The interviews lasted approximately one-hour and covered the following topics:

» General teaching background/experience

» Experience teaching online prior to spring 2020

» General attitudes about online teaching and learning

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[2] One faculty member did not teach in spring 2020 but has taught multiple classes online in the past few years.

- » Understanding of formative or whole-person education
- » Formative education teaching practices prior to the pandemic and transition to online
- » Formative education teaching practices targeting each of the following in the online environment:
    - Multiple dimensions of student development beyond the subject matter (i.e., students' intellectual, social, ethical, and spiritual lives)
    - Students' development of sense of purpose
    - Students' sense of community
- » Advice for other faculty seeking to facilitate formative education online

The interview data serve as the focal source of information for this Practice Guide. The data were coded and analyzed using an ethnographic, inductive approach involving multiple rounds of coding (Erickson, 2012; Kelle, 2000). The initial analysis began with analytic memo writing after each interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These memos captured our observations, reflections, and ideas for possible codes. For the next stage of analysis, the transcripts were coded in Dedoose. The initial codes were derived from our analytic memos, further review of the transcripts, and conversations among the research team. Codes were refined iteratively as the researchers analyzed the data and discussed the findings with one another.

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