New Zealand Political Studies Association

**Ako Network Roundtable Blog 27th April 2022 SUMMARY**

**Teaching Professionals Discuss Challenges of Teaching Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

This Ako Network Roundtable discussion was a follow-up conversation about the challenges teaching professionals faced whilst teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions framing the discussion were:
- How have we (you) been changed as learners and teachers?
- (How) does knowledge/discourse about learning and teaching appear to have shifted?

**Transition from Online-Only to Campus/Online Hybrid Teaching**

- The pandemic and lockdowns resulted in students being far more likely to schedule one-on-one meetings with teachers because it was far easier for them to attend online. However, even though on-campus teaching and in-person office hours have now returned, there remains an expectation that teachers will keep the option open for students to meet online. This creates a time management issue for teachers in having to manage all the different student meeting demands and different meeting formats.
- There was some agreement that online-only teaching works really well, and that campus-only teaching works really well, but that the hybrid of the two is very difficult.

**Online Meeting Difficulties**

- With online office hours with students, one teacher faced the issue that sometimes Zoom would shut the meeting room down if no students joined the call for a while due to idle activity. This required having to restart the call.
- Another teacher then suggested the use of Blackboard Collaborate instead for online office hours, which does not require teachers to have to worry about sending out Zoom links etc.
- There was an acknowledgement though that some students and teachers still simply prefer Zoom and are comfortable using it, and so the other suggestion of moving the mouse/touching the screen every now and then to prevent Zoom from timing out was offered.

**Anxiety about the Purpose of Lectures**

- One teacher has had difficulty navigating the fact that some students are attending lectures in-person, some are watching them online, and some are watching recordings at a later time. They are concerned that students not attending in person are getting a poorer experience than those who do. With 300-level courses they flipped the classroom and pre-recorded all the lectures so that every student had the same lecture experience. However, if pre-recorded lecture recordings are made, what then is done in the prescribed lecture time in-person on campus? There is still an inequality of treatment with this because those that cannot come onto campus may miss out on (or not receive the full benefit of) whatever happens in this in-person session.
- With first year papers specifically, the issue with providing pre-recorded lectures instead of hosting them in-person is that students may lack confidence to learn in this mode as it is completely new to them. In the Business School pre-recorded lectures were used and it was a disaster for first year students due to the nature of the student body - there were a lot of students who were the first in their families to attend university and had only just scraped through NCEA. Many first-year students do not yet have the capital to learn via pre-recorded lecturers.
- One teacher believes it is vital to use in-person lectures for first year students to create a narrative about how to be a university student. In-person classes are good for demystifying the work students have to do outside of class.
- Using in-person lectures to guide new students through 'how-to-do uni' stuff may be patronising to more academically capable students but it is very helpful for those who need the guidance.
- Another teacher uses tutorials to guide first year students through the 'doing' of university e.g. one tutorial focuses on taking lecture notes. They agree though that some of this content may be perceived as patronising by more advanced students. The challenge is striking a balance.
- Some teachers think that the lecture is the centrepiece of teaching and that it is where most learning happens. One teacher thinks that this is true for some students but that other students learn better in different ways. This teacher believes that the lecture is not necessarily the most important part of learning, and sometimes advises students who are time-poor to prioritise doing readings and participating in discussion hours ahead of attending lectures. However, they do still believe that there is value in coming to class and for some classes requires that students attend.

**Synchronous/Asynchronous Teaching**

- One teacher has heard from their students that the majority of their lectures have gone to asynchronous teaching, and are pre-recording lectures on Zoom and uploading them to Canvas for students to access whenever. They also heard from their students however that they really appreciate having a particular time to turn up at to attend class. Co-presence with the lecturer is valuable for discussions during class.
- Knowing that they have to be at a certain place at a certain time, and the ability to engage with the lecturer live, is extremely valuable to students.

**Dual Delivery**

- There is some concern that if dual delivery of lectures is maintained the in-person experience will not be all that it can be for those attending in-person, because teachers will have to worry about accommodating students who cannot attend in-person.
- One teacher thinks it will be a tragedy if lectures have to lessen the experience for those students that attend in person to accommodate those that attend online.
- An example of an in-person experience that cannot be participated in by students online that may be lost if online students are to be given the same experience was provided by one teacher. Students write their thoughts down on pieces of paper and then throw them across the room in a 'paper fight'. Students then pick up a random piece of paper written by another student and read it to the class. This enables people's thoughts to be shared without individual students fearing being grilled on their own ideas, and encourages people to speak up who otherwise might not have if they had to publicly defend their own ideas. The teacher finds that this exercise improves student engagement and so usually does it early in the trimester.
- The other members of the discussion were impressed with this idea, and like in-person classes for the fact that they can be used to introduce students to new methods of learning, such as the idea of handwriting notes with pen and paper.
- Another teacher used to hand out pens and paper to students, and make them write summary paragraphs about the lecture. This was designed to help students to improve their summarising skills, and prepared them for having to write in-person exams.

**Recording of Lectures**

- At the University of Auckland all on-campus lectures are automatically recorded and uploaded. This has not helped live attendance numbers.
- There was concern about if students in interactive style classes do not want what they say to be recorded and uploaded.
- One teacher has found that often when students speak up in a class the recording does not pick it up, so they repeat what students say so that those listening to the recording later can hear.
- Some of the teachers in the discussion noted that there is the ability to edit and remove some content from the recorded lectures before they are uploaded. They often remove what students have said from the recordings before uploading them when they think students may not want what they have said to be published publicly.

**The 'Hidden Curriculum'**

- Since the major adoption of online teaching, teachers have not yet worked out the best way to get students to engage with learning about the 'hidden curriculum'.
- One teacher believes that the best way to do this depends on how structured the relevant programme is. You can divide different skills exercises across different papers within a programme so that they are not repeated for students across different papers.
- Another good idea is to blend skills exercises with content that you want or need your students to engage with. When skills exercises are content driven, any repetition across papers is not so significant because the focus is on different content.

**Work Boundaries**

- There is concern that teaching which results in better evaluations, and the provision of skills exercises which result in stronger students, leave teachers exhausted.
- It is important to set time boundaries as to when you reply to student emails. One teacher suggests using the 'delay send' function in Outlook. This allows you to reply to emails when you want, but without giving students the impression that you will reply to their emails straight away or at any time.
- One way to minimise the workload for teachers is to have students peer-review their own work. This is also beneficial for students as it exposes them to different ways of writing tasks and gets them thinking about the content in different ways.
- Also, telling students why you are teaching something, or why you are teaching something in a certain way, or why you are using a certain form of assessment, reduces student confusion and minimises the time a teacher has to spend clarifying to students