



# Bridging the Digital Divide: Teaching with Empathy and Equity in the Wake of COVID-19

Webinar presented March 24, 2020

Presenter: Jessica Calarco, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Sociology  
Moderator: Carmen Henne-Ochoa, Ph.D. Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion  
Questions: Email to:  
College Office of Diversity and Inclusion [collodi@indiana.edu](mailto:collodi@indiana.edu) or  
Lindsay Brewer-Brown [lgurpen@indiana.edu](mailto:lgurpen@indiana.edu)

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## Resource List

### Low-Cost Internet:

- Overviews of providers, programs, and eligibility:
  - Guide to low-income internet options and affordable internet plans: <https://www.allconnect.com/blog/low-income-internet-guide>
  - Are there programs available to help make internet service more affordable? <https://www.highspeedinternet.com/resources/are-there-government-programs-to-help-me-get-internet-service>
- Purchasing a mobile hotspot can be a good option for those who don't qualify for low-cost internet programs:
  - Overview of best mobile hotspots: <https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-mobile-hotspots>
  - BestBuy: <https://www.bestbuy.com/site/mobile-phone-accessories/mobile-hotspots/pcmcat184700050008.c?id=pcmcat184700050008>
  - Boost Mobile: <https://www.boostmobile.com/plans/wi-fi-hotspot.html?intnav=TopNav:Plans:WiFiHotspotPlans>
- Encourage your university and/or local organizations to set up free Wi-Fi hotspots in parking lots.
  - Indiana University is making free Wi-Fi hotspots available to our communities in parking lots across the state. For location information, see this news release from IU: <https://news.iu.edu/stories/2020/03/iu/releases/24-free-wifi-access-parking-lot-hot-spots.html>

### Low-Cost Devices:

- Amazon has Kindle tablets for \$50. Learn more about this offer on the Amazon website:  
[https://www.amazon.com/All-New-Fire-Tablet-Display-Black/dp/B0794RHPZD/ref=sr\\_1\\_9?dchild=1&keywords=kindle&qid=1585150958&sr=8-9](https://www.amazon.com/All-New-Fire-Tablet-Display-Black/dp/B0794RHPZD/ref=sr_1_9?dchild=1&keywords=kindle&qid=1585150958&sr=8-9)
- Check out options for low-cost laptops here:  
<https://www.zdnet.com/article/best-cheap-laptops/>

### Tools and Information on Digital Accessibility

- Do reach out to your local campus Center for Teaching Excellence, even if you aren't aware of an enrolled student who requires an accommodation. Their staff can help with adjusting parts of your courses, and they will know the status of technology systems at your campus.
- If you have a student who does require accommodation, work closely with your local campus office that provides services to students with disabilities.
- IU Assistive Technology and Accessibility Centers  
<https://atac.iu.edu/>
- Learn to create accessible documents at work (or for students to share work with peers):  
<https://expand.iu.edu/browse/ittraining/single/courses/creating-accessible-documents-at-work>
- Learn about creating an accessible syllabus using Microsoft Word:  
<https://expand.iu.edu/browse/ittraining/single/courses/creating-an-accessible-syllabus-using-microsoft-word>
- Automatic captions provide a start, not a solution. Too often important words, phrases or sentences are dropped, particularly when there are multiple speakers or one who speaks quickly. Imagine the difference an omitted "not" makes for understanding.
- Make sure recordings and video are accurately captioned, including going back to review/edit auto-captions; Provide appropriate accommodations for all assignments and activities, including live classes, online discussions, and exams; and choose accessible Word docs over PDFs, as PDFs are frequently not accessible.

### Mental Health Services:

- Crisis Text Line: <https://www.crisistextline.org/>
  - Text CONNECT to 741741
  - Free mental health counseling 24/7
  - Help connecting to local service providers

- IU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)  
<https://healthcenter.indiana.edu/counseling/index.html>
- IU Care Referrals  
If you are concerned for yourself or another student, please submit a care referral online:  
[https://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/student-support/get-help/submit-care-referral.html?\\_ga=2.221209240.1640423647.1585074787-115997417.1583847022](https://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/student-support/get-help/submit-care-referral.html?_ga=2.221209240.1640423647.1585074787-115997417.1583847022)

### Resources Related to Housing and Food Insecurity

- Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice:  
<https://hope4college.com/>
- Fast Funds Program: <https://saragoldrickrab.com/fastfund/>  
(provides small grants to faculty who can give money directly to students who need immediate financial assistance)
- IU Office of Financial Wellness and Education  
Available for online one-on-one appointments for any IU student experiencing financial stress or looking for financial guidance  
<https://moneysmarts.iu.edu/index.html>
- Emergency Funding Sources:
  - Student Advocates Office:  
All students can apply for emergency funding up to \$500 through the Student Advocates Office.  
<https://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/student-support/advocates/index.html>
  - International Students:  
Short-term loans available for international students through the Office of International Services  
<https://ois.iu.edu/connect/contact.html>
- Bloomington Food Banks and Pantries
  - Hoosier Hills Food Bank  
<http://www.hhfoodbank.org/finding-food-in-monroe-county-as-of-jan-2020/>
  - Crimson Cupboard  
<https://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/student-support/crimson-cupboard/index.html>
  - Mother Hubbard's Cupboard  
<https://www.mhcfoodpantry.org/>

## Well-being and Social Connections

- IU Health Center  
Most services remain open to support our students! See the Health Center website for information and updates.  
<https://healthcenter.indiana.edu/index.html>
- IU Health Virtual Clinic  
Telehealth app through IU Health System, offering free coronavirus screening  
<https://iuhealth.org/news-hub/iu-health-virtual-clinic-offers-free-coronavirus-screening>
- Technology Tools
  - For information on how to co-watch on several platforms, click here:  
<https://www.technologyreview.com/s/615398/coronavirus-how-to-cowatch-netflix/>
  - For information on Netflix Party: <https://www.netflixparty.com/>
  - For an article about Zoom Party:  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/03/zoom-college-party-memes-page-dating-ok-zoomer/608617/>
- Articles
  - Coronavirus and Your Wellbeing  
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapsed178e>
  - Exercising During Coronavirus  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/19/well/move/coronavirus-covid-exercise-outdoors-infection-fitness.html>
  - The Scientific 7-Minute Workout  
<https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/09/the-scientific-7-minute-workout/>
  - CDC: Managing Anxiety and Stress  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

## General Support Resources

- Keep Teaching IU  
<https://keep-teaching.iu.edu/>
- Keep Learning IU  
<https://keep-learning.iu.edu/>
- IU Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning  
<https://citl.indiana.edu/>
- IU Coronavirus Website  
<https://coronavirus.iu.edu/>

### Additional Links on the "Digital Divide"

Gonzales, A. L., McCrory Calarco, J., & Lynch, T. (2018). Technology Problems and Student Achievement Gaps: A Validation and Extension of the Technology Maintenance Construct. *Communication Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218796366>

Smith, A., Rainie, L., & Zickuhr, K. (2011, July 19). College students and technology. Retrieved March 25, 2020, from Pew Research Center website: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2011/07/19/college-students-and-technology/?fbclid=IwAR0QwfMXIwyubayl3vks-iFWYmBvsyX2ILgiEWgh9oJCfJoEOTfvDTIIZYw>

United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. (2020, March). *Fact Sheet: Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools While Protecting the Civil Rights of Students*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-coronavirus-fact-sheet.pdf>

Weissman, S. (2020, March 19). For students with disabilities, a mass shift to online courses comes with deep concerns. Retrieved from <https://diverseeducation.com/article/170320/>

Williams, D. (2020). The COVID-19 DEI Crisis Action Strategy Guide: Recommendations to Drive Inclusive Excellence. Atlanta, GA: Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership & Social Innovation <https://inclusiveexcellenceacademy.org/deiandcovid19/>

### Jessica Calarco's Letter to Her Introduction to Sociology Students (Spring 2020)

Dear Students,

I'm writing today with a heavy heart - saddened to know that I won't be seeing you all in person again soon.

In the wake of President McRobbie's decision to hold classes online for the remainder of the semester, I wanted to reach out to offer words of reassurance and also to explain the decisions I have made about how we will proceed with our course.

Please know that **if you are feeling anxious or upset right now, you are certainly not alone**. Many of us are trying to figure out how we're going to move forward

amidst serious disruptions to our normal routines. Many of us are concerned about our own health or the health of people we love. Please **be kind to yourselves** in this difficult time. And please know that if this semester is not your best, if your grades do not reflect your full potential - it will be okay. What you learn in your courses should ultimately matter more than the grades you earn.

That said, I understand that grades do matter. And I understand that many of you are concerned about how this semester's disruptions might impact your eligibility for opportunities at IU and in your future careers.

Along those lines, I have decided to **make changes to our course requirements** that will, hopefully, **reduce some of the pressure around grades**. My goal in making these changes is to support your health and well-being and ensure that you all have the resources and support you need to complete the remaining work in our course as successfully as possible. To briefly summarize the key changes:

1. **Attendance will no longer be taken in class.** That said, I strongly encourage you to continue engaging with the reading and listening materials and with our weekly course meetings, which you can do by joining us for the live-streamed classes, by watching the recorded videos after class, or by reading the written transcripts of those videos and following along with the power point slides.
2. **All remaining reading quizzes and in-class activity reflections will be optional.** If you complete optional quizzes or in-class activity reflections, and you score higher on those assignments than on assignments previously submitted, I will count the higher grades.
3. **You will have the option to either complete the final exam or the final project.** If you complete both, I will only count the higher of the two grades.
4. **The grading rubric has been updated** to reflect the restructured assignments.
5. **The course schedule has been updated** to reflect the extended spring break.

You can find more detailed information about these and other changes in the revised syllabus and in an announcement (titled "ALL THE THINGS RELATED TO IU COURSES GOING ONLINE"), both of which are posted on Canvas. The syllabus is also attached here.

My hope is that these changes will give you the support and flexibility you need to continue learning and succeeding in our course. That said, I also understand that some of you are facing particularly challenging constraints. To that end, I have decided that **no student in this class will receive a final grade lower than the**

**grade they had when courses went online.** Work you do for the remainder of the semester can raise your grade, but your final grade will not be lower than what it is right now.

**If you are at all concerned about your ability to complete the work for this course, please let me know.** I am happy to work with you to develop an individualized plan that accommodates your needs and the challenges you face.

Please take time over break to rest and breathe. Please know that I am thinking of you and hoping you are well.

With gratitude and respect,

Professor Calarco

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## Webinar: Bridging the Digital Divide: Teaching for Equity and Empathy in the Wake of COVID-19

Presented: Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Location: Indiana University Bloomington, College of Arts + Sciences

Presenter: Jessica Calarco, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Sociology

Moderator: Carmen Henne-Ochoa, Ph.D. Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion

[Please follow this link to access the webinar recording.](#)

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## List of Curated Questions - Bridging the Digital Divide Webinar

Below is a list of curated questions that were submitted by webinar registrants ahead of time. In providing this list, we want to encourage you to organize discussions on your campus to explore inclusive and equitable answers and solutions to the digital divide and the empathy gap. The questions that appear in bold below were addressed during the webinar, and hence, some answers/solutions are offered in bullet points. We wish you the very best as we collectively strive to serve our students in these unprecedented times!

### **What are the best practices for remote education, from an equity/access/inclusion perspective?**

- Keep in mind that our students didn't sign up to take online classes
- We can't rely on best practices that were developed for courses where professors and students knew they would be teaching and learning online
- Some best practices we can follow:
  - Setting reasonable expectations for what can be accomplished this semester
  - Giving students as many options as possible, while minimizing the extra work we create
  - Treating students with kindness and empathy – offering them support when we can and avoiding further harm



### **How should we think about incentivizing (or not incentivizing) attendance and participation as classes move online?**

- Simply requiring synchronous participation is not equitable given the challenges students may be facing (they didn't sign up for this)
- For many of our students, this is likely the biggest and most challenging disruption they have ever faced in their lives – our classes shouldn't be their primary concern
- Encourage students to continue participating and attending (synchronously or asynchronously), but not equitable to require attendance or expect students to participate at the same level they were before

### **How can we adjust our expectations around assignments that would have previously been completed in class?**

- Avoid creating more work for our students (and ourselves) - we could all use a break
- Cut assignments that aren't critical for achieving learning objectives
- Give a longer window for completion to give time for students to participate in the class asynchronously
- Consider making those assignments optional (possibly to substitute for lower grades on similar assignments from earlier in the semester)

### **How can we do online assessments in an equitable way?**

- Give students more time to complete the test
- Rewrite parts of your exams - lots of critical thinking and short answer questions and also a much bigger test bank so that each student gets a different set of questions on their tests
- Make the exams open notes and open book, and encourage students to work together to fill out a study guide with key information that is likely to be included on the test
- With what's happening this semester, don't assume that students will have access to reliable internet to complete their exams, and can't give them the option of taking the exam on paper, so consider giving students a project option that they can complete in lieu of the final, online exam

### **How can we accommodate students with disabilities, and especially those with limited access to technology?**

- Give students as many options for participation and engagement as possible, in the hopes that that will help both students with disabilities and students who might be struggling with technology-related challenges
- In terms of participation, for example, students have the option of:
  - Participating synchronously through Microsoft Teams, which provides automatic live-captioning

- Watching the downloaded video of our classes, with the transcript posted alongside
- Reading the text transcript and viewing the lecture slides
- In terms of exams, give students the option of either completing the final exam online or doing a project, instead (previously, both the exam and the project were required)
- Reach out to students individually, and especially to those who have already notified you about accommodations they need this semester, to check in and see if there is any additional support they need

**Do universal accommodations give too many advantages to students who don't need them?**

- Without a massive reduction in the power of privilege in our society, we can't avoid giving advantages to students who don't need them
- Our whole educational system is set up to give advantages to affluent, white students
- What we can do is prevent students without those privileges from falling through the cracks
- Offer accommodations and flexibility that students can access without having to ask

**How should we hold students accountable if they aren't completing the assigned work?**

- This might not be the time for accountability
- This is a time for empathy
- This is probably one of the biggest, if not the biggest, challenges that our students have faced in their lives
- Most important thing I can do as an instructor is to avoid causing further harm
- If student stops coming to class, and stops turning in assignments, and doesn't take the final exam, don't assume that they're just slacking off
- Instead, assume that they are struggling and need as much empathy as I can offer, and give them a grade based on the work they completed before classes went online; rather make this assumption and be wrong than make the first assumption and risk causing further harm

**How can we support students who face new challenges and responsibilities (e.g., childcare responsibilities, work responsibilities, family responsibilities, housing or food or economic insecurity), in the wake of coronavirus-related disruptions?**

- Educate yourself about the resources that are available, both locally and nationally

- Compile lists of information about food banks, financial support, technology-access programs, emergency childcare programs, and more - and send those resources to your students
- Check in with your students; ask them how they're doing - offer them support in finding the information and resources they need
- If your class ends up turning into just an online support group that meets once or twice a week, that might be a perfectly fine solution as well

### **What resources are out there for students who are struggling with access to technology?**

- If students don't have internet access at home, they may qualify for programs that provide low-cost, high-speed wireless internet to low-income families
  - Internetessentials.com (\$10 a month from Comcast)
  - AT&T's Digital You program (also \$10 a month)
  - Those programs, however, do generally require that students or their families already have qualified for other government programs like food stamps, and many college students don't qualify for those programs on their own
- One thing we're doing at IU is to set up drive-in internet at campus parking lots – at the stadium, the Orange Lot now has free wifi for students and community members, and there are other similar parking lots at regional IU campuses, as well
  - You can encourage your University IT department to set up similar wifi parking lots for students
  - And you can encourage other local community organizations to do the same thing
  - Here in Bloomington, IN, the local public schools are also turning their parking lots into wifi hotspots for anyone in the community to use
- In terms of devices, there are low-cost laptops and tablets out there - \$200 laptops and even \$50 Kindles are better than trying to type a paper on a phone
  - For many students, though, and especially right now, even \$50 might be out of reach
  - If you have students who are in that situation and need access to devices, you might check with your university library to see if they have devices available to loan
  - You might also look into applying for the FastFunds program set up by Sara Goldrick Rab and which gives grants to faculty members to provide funds directly to students in times of need

**Is there a unified place we can send students who are struggling with the disruptions caused by the pandemic? For example, those who need help with steady housing or food, or those who may need mental health services?**

- If you're concerned about your students' access to housing and food, I'd suggest checking out the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice: <https://hope4college.com/>
  - They have a great set of resources for each of those different areas of need:  
<https://hope4college.com/>
  - The Hope Center also has recommendations for administrators on how to adjust financial aid practices, work study programs, and enrollment decisions in the wake of COVID-19
- If you're concerned about your students' mental health or want to help them connect to mental health resources, one good national option is the Crisis Text Line  
<https://www.crisistextline.org/>
  - It's a 24/7 resource that provides free, immediate support from trained crisis counselors
  - They can also help students connect to free or low-cost services in their area for ongoing support
  - Students can text CONNECT to 741741 to use the service

**How do we foster community in our courses now that classes have moved online?**

- Answer depends a lot on the size of your course and what the dynamics of the class were before you moved things online
- Not wise to create new group activities or required message boards; it will create more work for your students and for you and thereby might lead to more stress than it solves
- If you already incorporated discussion and group work into the course before the transition online, then continue using those tools (at least in an optional way) to help students engage with the material
- In my [Prof. Calarco's] Introduction to Sociology class, for example:
  - Students had already formed small groups to work with in completing the final project
    - The final project is now optional (they can do that or take the final exam)
    - But I'm encouraging them to continue engaging with their groups through the channels they had already established for communication (in some cases email, or GroupMe, or text – whatever they prefer)



- Even before this transition, I also allowed students to complete in-class assignments as group assignments (mostly short reflections on activities we did in class). Those assignments are now optional. But students still have the option of working together with classmates if they decide to complete them
- Rather than create a whole new message board where students can communicate, continue to use the same tools you were using before

### **What is our role in combating the spread of misinformation during the pandemic?**

- Present accurate information about the virus and about what research says about the most appropriate response
- Give students the tools to find the facts for themselves
- Talk about how to be good consumers of research
- Discuss research showing that even college students aren't great at distinguishing real news from fake news
- Discuss how to critically assess the information we encounter in the news
- Great article from Quartz.com that links to lots of resources for teaching students to think like "fact checkers" it's titled "In the age of fake news, here's how schools are teaching kids to think like fact checkers"  
<https://qz.com/1533747/in-the-age-of-fake-news-heres-how-schools-are-teaching-kids-to-think-like-fact-checkers/> (by Annabelle Timsit)
- Common Sense Media also has a really useful set of tools and tips for teachers and students from K-12 through college  
<https://www.common sense.org/education/teaching-strategies/turn-students-into-fact-finding-web-detectives>

### **Do we as educators have a responsibility to push for efforts like net neutrality that are aimed at reducing the digital divide?**

- The term net neutrality is used in a few different ways
  - It can refer to rules around internet service providers making it easier for people to access some types of content than others (for example, without net neutrality, a video website might be able to pay your internet service provider to get them to give their site preferential treatment, which would mean videos from that site would load faster and have fewer buffering errors than other video websites)
  - More generally, though, the term is sometimes used to talk about making the internet accessible to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay

- With that second definition, we might think of efforts to achieve net neutrality in terms of things like governments providing free wifi in public places
- Or we might think about turning internet services into public utilities rather than privately owned companies
- Arguably, those more public solutions would help reduce the digital divide
  - The reason internet coverage is so spotty in rural areas, for example, is that there's no financial incentive for companies to bring internet access to those areas – the cost it would take to get internet out there is so high that it wouldn't be made up for by the revenues brought in from the few households that were there
  - Public solutions would also help people outside of rural areas, as well, by making internet more affordable
    - Certainly, there are \$10 a month internet packages, but those only cover the lowest income households
    - Many families with slightly higher incomes still can't afford \$100 a month or more for home wifi
    - And relying on cellular internet puts them at risk of high overage charges if they use more than their allotted data for the month
    - Relying on cellular internet also isn't great if you need to do things like write a paper – that's not something we want students doing on their phones
- Efforts to make internet more accessible to our most vulnerable students can help them now, in this time of crisis, and they can also help students be better prepared and better connected when schools finally open again

**Additional questions/comments (note that these are included below as originally received from webinar registrants)**

- Do you have specific comments about (a) putting labs online, (b) assessments from home, and (c) how this affects students in other countries beyond the US (e.g., where digital inequalities are even larger than in the US)?
- We work with a graduate students and do not have residence halls on our campus. We require students to be in the clinical setting and many of them had had cancelled clinical placements. Can you advise how to better support students through online learning (when they need to develop clinical skills) and also when they might not have been able to get all of the clinical hours they need in order to complete academic requirements?

- How do you recommend tailoring discussion-based engagement and analytical writing exercised for online teaching keeping differences in learning and internet access in mind?
- I already know of a handful of students (actually more) that depend on the IU campus WiFi because they do not have it at home in the apartments or their family's home. Most have smartphones but I cannot imagine the difficulty (and stress) of writing a response to an exam on the phone the way one can on a computer or tablet. I also have students that returned to their home countries (S. Korean for example). I am sure there will be problems navigating their needs. I teach 4 sections this semester and a lot of students (270+60+ 30+1). I am already struggling to communicate with all of them and their AIs and I have experience teaching online courses. I can't imagine how my tech-challenged colleagues are dealing with the situation and what that might look like on the receiving end (students).
- I'm a leadership consultant & Gallup strengths coach at UNL. A number of my administrator & manager level coaching clients & workshop participants have asked about how they can become more empathetic, even though their own natural empathy is not very high. What might you share with them to help them practice deeper empathy when it doesn't come naturally to them?
- Wat are the connections and similarities in k-12 students?
- What steps are being taken to follow up with students, staff, and faculty to assess the success and areas for growth in online instruction?
- What mechanisms are in place to gather student input during this transition?

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