We have a lot of faculty who are concerned about the efficacy of online teaching. Are we going to be as good of teachers online as we’ve been? Are our students going to miss something by not having face to face instruction?

AM: I would say absolutely you can have the same relationships with your students the same efficacy. You can still have that same in rich classroom work that you have now, and it’s a lot of fun.

RS: You know I agree. We were talking in preparation for this to make sure we on the same page, and the first thing we discussed was my number one myth that the quality of online education is lower than face to face. We can be present with our students online, it’s just how we implement different types of best practices and really utilize our creativity to make sure that we’re providing the best education for our students. A lot of our students within the program say that they’ve gotten more out of our online courses. Again, it’s all about a strategy and how you’re approaching building your course.

So, Dr. Moore, you mentioned some early mistakes that you made. Can you can you pick out one or two that that were really significant?

AM: Yes. I was teaching a pathophysiology course, face-to-face, and I wanted students to have all of the same information and I put those lectures up and I bet I was working 70 hours a week doing podcasts and then I would still meet the students in class, but my podcasts were about an hour long a piece, and I was doing voice overs. I would have three every week, so I was killing myself for one thing. And so, I would say one thing that that I really learned from that is that we need to lead our students and to guide them to obtain that information that they need for their certification for their career instead of spoon feeding them. That and making the online course a really clean course. When you are in a classroom, you expect that there’s not trash; you expect the media works and the lights are working. We should see the same thing in our online platform; it should be really nice and clean.  We have a fabulous IT department, and the instructional designers, who are fantastic, help us design our courses so the students who are in our program see very similar set up in each course.  The courses may all be different, but the students aren’t having to learn how to find a quiz in Canvas or Sekai or whatever platform that you’re on.

And I think the other thing is, I was telling them everything, and I didn’t have their feedback. It’s not me talking all the time. I want to hear from my students. And so, having the tools to really visit with your students. Zoom is a fantastic tool to use with students, and there are several others that that we use. You can record videos you can do things, you can have synchronous classes or asynchronous; you can record a lecture, send it out to students and have reminders. So, I think having that engagement with the students is very important.

RS: As I said, Amy and I had a chance to touch base, and we both made a similar mistake where we were trying to do hour-long lectures. When you have a face-to-face class, you prepare leading up to that week, and you might have a three-hour course and you would plan for maybe an hour lecture, and you’re building in different opportunities for students to engage to do some sort of in-class assignment. You kind of have to get away from
that when you’re going to an online platform and realize that smaller chunks of information given to the students in various pieces during the week is going to be way more effective than recording yourself and having them listen to an hour lecture.

So, I think that’s one thing is we have to understand in the current climate. There’s an overwhelming amount of anxiety, there’s an overwhelming and varying number of jobs that we’re having to do. We don’t want to frustrate our students any more than they probably already feel with all have going on.

There is never going to be a perfect class, and that’s something that you just continuously keep working on from semester to semester. You’re tweaking your course based off of what you’ve learned and feedback. So, don’t worry as much about trying to have the perfect lecture or the perfect course content. What you really want to do is just make sure they get the information that they need, they know where to find it and understand it. If they don’t, that’s where we come in being present within our classes. I love Zoom, I think it’s an easy thing; it’s free for our students; they can use it on their phones and their tablets, wherever they may be; and it’s cost effective. It’s also great for our students who can be in more rural areas so they can easily use on whatever modality they have.

Are any one of you using chat rooms or discussion?

AM: On occasion I do, and part of it depends, I think, on the size of the class, if you are having discussion with 100 students, I think is a lot more difficult. If you have smaller groups, I think that works well.

RS: I agree. I think it depends on your class sizes. When you get into classes that are going into, you know, hundreds or even 50s, that’s a lot to manage. For our discussions, I go in read through some of the comments, and then reply to some. I don’t try to do every single student, because it’s just not feasible. You don’t have to respond to everybody, but you do need to show that you’re there, you’re listening to what they’re saying, you can keep the conversation going. That’s how we utilize (chats/discussions) within our (program). We’re asking the questions, challenging students to determine how they are taking the knowledge that we’re giving and applying it to a real-world situation. And then, I’m in there to kind of challenge them, as well as their peers, to kind of think outside the box.

What are some of the other strategies that you are using that you think are just great tools to be able to stay connected to students, and if you could give one takeaway today for a professor who’s brand new to this, what do you think would be a really helpful tool for them?

RS: For me, especially during this current climate, I think the one thing is like a weekly announcement or just a check-in asking, like, “Hey, how are you?” or “Let me know if you need anything.” Just kind of being in the room and not necessarily going with that whole myth of you put your online course up, and then it runs itself. Be honest and transparent with your students. I have a 1 year old that I’m trying to take care of as well, and so I ask my students to bear with me. It’s like all the sudden, I became a real person to them, and not just a professor. Something that I did initially was I would send an email out every Monday, just recapping from my course what the expectations were for the week and due dates, directing them to the calendar. It almost gave them a little bit of direction for the week.

AM: I agree totally with reaching out to students. I would say, when you’re moving a course — especially if you’re brand new to the online environment — don’t expect that you’re going to be able to change everything in that first semester. I’ve been teaching in one of the courses that I facilitate for about three years, and I’m still creating new lectures in it. Also look there are a lot of fun tools that you can use. If you have a PowerPoint, chunk what is needed and put it into a VoiceThread. We started using Light Board, which we’ll get to that, and I know Rebecca has used Light Board as well … and there’s whiteboard (Office Zoom). So, if you can’t have a Light Board, set up the whiteboard; it allows you write on it and you can see the faculty on it. You can put a PowerPoint on it. I would also repeat Rebecca: Get on Zoom and have a meeting one evening to answer questions or visit. We don’t want you to think that you’re out there by yourself and it allows students to see each other.

Have either one of you used a strategy that helps with self-directed learning?

AM: I do in two of the courses I teach. In informatics, I do it with my co-facilitator, and I think that’s a really nice thing when you have somebody who is facilitating with you that you work really well with, it’s nice to see both facilitators online. One thing we do is clarify what’s expected for the week; if it’s group work, let us know who’s
working. In another course, I work with a faculty and we give the highlights — it’s a course in diagnostics — that we really want the students to get out of the course. Again, we don’t hand it to them, but we direct them to what they really need to be looking at.

RS: I use in my courses to basically look back at an assignment that you did, or a quiz or a discussion forum that was completed, here are somethings that I’m noticing and let me just kind of guide you to maybe more of an accurate answer that’s going to be related to the certification exam or licensure or whatever it may be so that they are not out there thinking, “Ok, well if my instructor didn’t say anything than this must be correct.” So, helping them recap a little, understand the shift of where we’re moving to and then kind of get them ready for that next mindset for the following week. Sometimes when you get into summer courses, which are much shorter, there is a lot more information and so those transitions are not as clean as I feel like a 16-week program or a fall or spring semester can be. Sometimes it can be hey go check out this video or here’s an article that kind of gets you in the right mindset. Here’s a little story that might help you envision what we might be expecting this week. So, I think it 100% helps students remind themselves about what’s due and to put it on their calendar.

Let’s talk about exam integrity and some pointers on trying to maintain that.

RS: We actually just did our comprehensive exam a couple of days ago; if my students are watching, they’re probably wondering if I graded them yet. No, I have not; but we’re getting through it. We utilized with Zoom at that time where they could log into the room and know I’m there as a proctor. They could ask questions throughout the exam, but it kind of allowed for us at any time to ask them to share their screen so we could see how things were going, allowing for them to scan the room. But honestly at some point you have to have faith in your students; that’s also very hard as an instructor to know that our students are being honest and faithful during this time especially when it gets a little crazy. But for the most part, we utilize that Zoom platform, and then within our Sekai courses there are honor pledges that the students have to sign stating that they are not utilizing other materials. We also put time limits on them, so it really kind of pressures them to know the knowledge, not necessarily have too much time to maybe look at a textbook or Google it. We also structure it very similarly to a certification exam, so if you get one minute per question that’s what you get. When we need to proctor an exam, we utilize Zoom so the students can see us and we can see them. That way, you can tell if there’s an issue that needs to be resolved at that time.

AM: So, it’s interesting that you bring this up. I’m serving on the Technology Assisted Learning Committee, and this is something that we’re actually looking at for the entire HSC. Some of our faculty have used Zoom, and it’s amazing when they see the student on the phone, calling another student, and they’re asking them the question. So, it’s amazing what students are doing. For our graduate program, a couple of our faculty piloted the software Respondus, this last semester, which also has a video function. It worked very well, and they had no issues with it. The students’ grades actually didn’t change a lot as far as the average from the previous semesters, but the students finished the exams quicker. So, we felt like students are much more prepared by having that exam proctor with that video. And so, we have actually just opened that up for the School of Nursing. I think that for the School of Nursing we’ll end up probably using Respondus for a majority of our exams, especially our high-stake exams. Again, we’re really looking at what options there are for schools because that’s something that we really have to look at for accreditation, and that’s across the country.

What strategies would you recommend for active learning or engagement in the online environment? Do you have recommendations, such as the polling feature in Zoom, Poll Everywhere, Kahoot, Top Hat or others? If so, any pearls of words or wisdom?

RS: So, I’ve utilized all of those and I think it just depends on what platform you’re using whether it’s Canvas, Blackboard, Sekai and how it communicates. So, I know with our ET group, which are fabulous, what I typically do if there’s something I want to utilize is ask if it communicates with our software. If doesn’t, it kind of rules it out. Poll Everywhere is a really cool tool that you can use, and even the poll feature within the Zoom, if you’re doing like a live class. It allows students who may not be as open to sharing in that type of environment to give their input without being identified, or it can even stimulate a conversation that you didn’t even realize needed to happen within your course. I also will sometime make spreadsheets or fun banner, or different kind of like picture-type materials that make it more graphic for the student to see the information. Then, I’ll explain it within the Zoom meeting and allow for input. Any way that you can provide the information to the student, it’s really helpful to have it in multiple types of languages, modes and modalities for them. There’s even a breakout room feature in Zoom, which you can assign students into that gives you that type of quick group work you’re wanting to do, and then you can have them present on it to the entire class. It has that similar effectiveness of a face-to-face type classroom.
AM: I agree. Most of our classrooms are asynchronous, but we'll have a couple that are synchronous this summer, because we won't be on campus. And so, we'll be using Poll Everywhere. I think that's a really nice tool to use with students to make sure that they're still there and that they're listening and paying attention and getting that information. Because most of our classes are asynchronous, just having times that we set aside to just talk about the content that they're studying, what's important or do question and answer time for students. Most of the time, I do this at night because our students, nurses, are at work during the day in the graduate program. I can give a scenario for my group of students and have them run through it. That gives you a good indication of whether they are getting it.

How do we teach things that would usually be considered “hands on,” such as cadaver lab and etc.?  
AM: In one of the courses that I teach, we do a lot of skills in that course. In the acute care programs, they do some of the art lines and chest tubes and things like that. We do suturing; we're doing the best that we can. We're putting videos up for the content, which we already did, but we are also having a classroom day this summer, which is something that we've not had to do before. There are some I think there's some things that you may not be able to do online. This is the one thing that we do on campus, but you know something we're doing the very best that we can to do it online. We are actually going to do what Rebecca mentioned; we're going to separate into our different classrooms, and we're going to have different faculty in our chat rooms on Zoom working with their students. During the fall and some of those students will come back for some of those skills, but otherwise we're putting a lot of videos up, and then we're going to actually go through it with them online.

RS: So, if you can't be in a hands-on room, try and mimic it for them; model what you hope for them to be able to accomplish. Again, you're kind of at that point of hoping, that based off of your instruction, when they get into that clinical setting they're going to have more exposure and supervision to maybe provide them more articulate experiences. So, I agree with both of you.

Could I suggest having a staff member that is currently not working join the classroom Zoom meeting? They can monitor the question and answer in chat with the instructor, so they can concentrate on answering the questions and teaching the class — someone who serves as a moderator or an assistant of sorts.
RS: I personally have not, but typically what I tell my students is that I have the Q&A off to the side. I think that suggestion is really nice because it does get very distracting at times when you're trying to teach and this bubble comes up or this light starts flashing. I think it would be very appropriate, and it also provide some transparency to that staff member that maybe students also don't get a chance to interact with either. And so, for both of our staff, I don't think any of our students have ever physically seen them. Putting a face to that name and welcoming them into that type of environment might actually also help to provide some sort of inclusive experience not only from the staff but also from students.

AM: I usually have a co-facilitator and so while one is speaking the other one will be watching the chat. I think it's a fantastic idea if someone's available.

What tools do you have available, and what criteria do you use to select a specific tool? Which is your favorite?
RS: I think it just depends on the learning objectives that you have for that particular class. A lot of our introduction classes, we may not have as much tools or things that we use, other than our school has recently moved to a panoptic platform. There's a lot of interactive features in there, such as note taking and quizzes, they can ask questions, and we can have all of our accessibility features in there so all of our students are getting the same information in one setting. But I think it just depends on the class; for our earlier classes, we typically have a lot more educational-like panoptic lectures; as you get further along into the courses or into the program, we kind of move more into the Zoom meetings where we want them to practice what they're preaching. We want them to be able to show us and demonstrate to us that they're actually taking the knowledge that we're providing them and applying it. So, I think it's all based on our learning objectives: are they gaining knowledge at that time or are they applying it. That's how we utilize and pick what tool and strategy we're hoping to use within a class.

AM: I agree totally. It's dependent on the objectives, and for me teaching, it depends on what I'm trying to teach. I would say whatever tool I'm using, I really try to stick with short presentations. If I'm teaching content, if we can teach something in five or 10 minutes, the students tend to pay attention a lot better for that short length of period, or up to 20 minutes. It also depends on what I'm trying to teach, and like Rebecca said, if the student is needing to use the tool to present. I would imagine that in most of the schools, the students need to present something back, and so we use a lot of VoiceThread, and we have it embedded in Canvas.