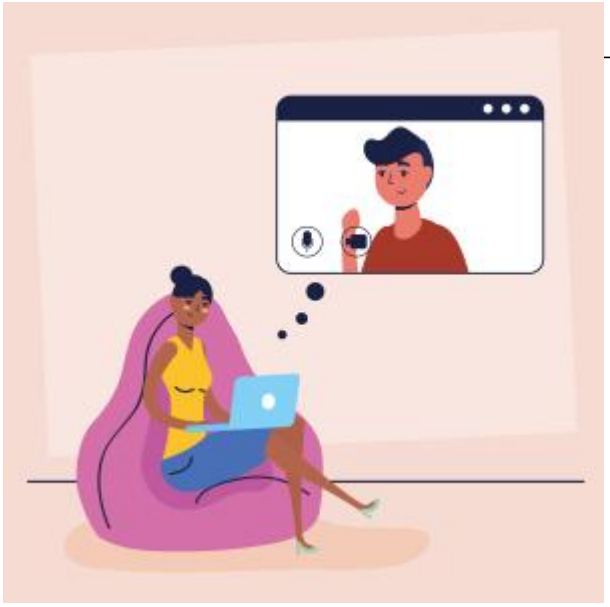
Published on *University of Colorado* (https://www.cu.edu)

Beyond Office Hours: Adding Outreach to Your Teaching Presence [1]



Digital Education [2]

[3]

In March of 2021 I attended the Online Learning Consortium's virtual conference, Innovate: Education Reimagined [4]. One of the more thought-provoking sessions was from Derek Snyder, an Assistant Professor of English at University of Hawai'i Maui College. His presentation, "From Office Hours to Outreach Hours: A Proactive Approach to Student Engagement and Success" [5] focused on the approach of moving away from traditional office hours to "outreach hours", where meetings with students are more intentional and meant to engage at a deeper level, leading to increased student success. Derek uses this approach in his own writing-intensive course (which has fairly limited student enrollment), and I've been reflecting on how instructors can use this same idea and adapt it to a variety of situations, content areas, and class sizes.

While not explicitly stated during Derek's presentation, the approach of outreach hours fits in perfectly with the Community of Inquiry [6] model that we often refer to in our work with faculty. I see it as an expansion of what teaching presence can look like in the online classroom, along with infusing both social and cognitive presence into the activity as well. That's perhaps what I like about it most; by rethinking what our traditional office hours look like online, we can engage students more deeply in the tenets of the Community of Inquiry and help improve success.

Here are some of the ideas and strategies for outreach hours, both shared by Derek in his presentation and an expansion on some of my own thoughts as well:

Connect Early with Each Student

It's a good practice to connect with each student individually, early on in the course (during the first week, if possible!) There are a variety of methods to accomplish this online, such as:

- Responding to each student's introduction posts, welcoming them to class
- Using a tool like Slack or Microsoft Teams for an easy, quick "How's it going?" or "Nice to meet you!" approach.
- Utilizing messages to students which can be sent through the Canvas gradebook [7] (particularly helpful when reaching out to students who have missing assignments during that first week).
    - *Bonus!* This approach is especially helpful for large enrollment classes.
- Involve your TAs, if you got 'em! Connecting with each student doesn't have to rest solely on the primary instructor. Check-ins from teaching assistants can be equally as valuable to students, and it also helps share some of the load in a high enrollment class.

Whatever your approach, the important part is being proactive and keeping it short. The idea is to build an initial connection with each student (initiated by you, the instructor) and to open up the lines of communication. This helps set the stage for continued communication throughout the semester.

Define a Distinct Purpose for Outreach Hours

In my work with faculty who have taught online previously, one common challenge I hear is that instructors hold frequent open office hours on Zoom (the instructor is in a Zoom meeting room for one hour, where students may join and talk if needed), but students rarely show up. In other words, faculty are attempting to replicate traditional in-person office hours or an "open door" policy in the online environment. This is a difficult task in the online environment, and it may help to think about it from another angle.

Zoom meetings are more formal than traditional "knock on the door and say hi" interactions. If you'd like to touch base with students each week (even informally), consider adding a distinct purpose and agenda. Try inviting students to this optional conversation in which they know what the discussion will revolve around. For instance, a defined "outreach hour" might address questions about an upcoming project, or recap common mistakes found in last week's midterm exam. I have also found success in inviting students to collaboratively create the agenda for an upcoming outreach hour; students have access to a Google Doc where they can add agenda items and have autonomy in guiding the direction of our time together.

Ideas for Student Group Outreach

If you've incorporated team projects in your class, a great way to stay connected with students is by intentional outreach with each group. (This is also a nice time-saving outreach strategy if you have a large class!) This type of outreach can be done quickly, using communication tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, or simply an email or Canvas message. Try to reach out to one team each week (perhaps every Monday morning) and ask them how it's going on their project. Use that week to communicate back and forth about any questions, and meet virtually if needed.

Connecting with student groups or teams is a strategy that TA's can assist with, and is additionally helpful in a high enrollment course where it's difficult to connect with individual students on a regular basis.

Final Thoughts

Outside of these dedicated outreach hours, of course students can also schedule time to meet with you as needed. If a student wants to talk with you individually with a more sensitive or individual question, let them schedule time with you for a one-on-one discussion. Our team has found Calendly [8] to be a very helpful tool! It eliminates the back-and-forth scheduling attempts, and automatically adds an invitation and Zoom link to your calendar.

So… are you ready to move beyond traditional office hours and into outreach hours? Try it out this semester and see what you think. Need more ideas? Schedule a time to chat with one of our instructional designers! ODE Instructional Design Consultations [9].

online teaching [10], Online Education [11]
Display Title:
Beyond Office Hours: Adding Outreach to Your Teaching Presence
Send email when Published:
Yes

Source URL:https://www.cu.edu/blog/online-teaching-blog/beyond-office-hours-adding-outreach-your-teaching-presence

Links
[1] https://www.cu.edu/blog/online-teaching-blog/beyond-office-hours-adding-outreach-your-teaching-presence [2] https://www.cu.edu/blog/online-teaching-blog/author/38469
[3] https://www.cu.edu/sites/default/files/AdobeStock_359615643.jpeg
[4] https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/attend-2021/innovate/program/all_sessions/
[5] https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/olc-innovate-2021-session-page/?session=9652&kwds=
[6] https://coi.athabascau.ca/coi-model/ [7] https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Instructor-Guide/How-do-I-send-a-message-to-students-from-the-Gradebook/ta-p/741 [8] https://calendly.com/
[9] https://calendly.com/ode-instructional-design [10] https://www.cu.edu/blog/online-teaching-blog/tag/online-teaching [11] https://www.cu.edu/blog/online-teaching-blog/tag/online-education