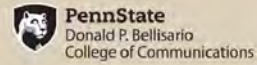


Bortree, Denise Sevick

From: Bortree, Denise Sevick
Sent: Tuesday, October 13, 2020 2:18 PM
To: L-COMM-FACULTY@LISTS.PSU.EDU
Subject: Teaching Tuesdays - Keeping Things Interesting by Chris Skurka

TEACHING



TUESDAYS

Welcome to Teaching Tuesdays. I hope you're finding the advice that your peers share here useful. If you adopt ideas from Teaching Tuesdays, reach out to the authors to let them know. I appreciate how our community is coming together to inspire each other during this unusual time. In this week's issue of Teaching Tuesdays, **Chris Skurka shares four activities he has tried in his classes to increase student engagement and critical thinking skill**. Also, the university finalized an agreement with **Top Hat** in Septembers ([more here](#)), and Shannon Kennan shares helpful tips for using Top Hat in your courses. Lots of good ideas in this issue. Have a great week. Denise

Upcoming lectures and events

The campus is quiet these days, but our college is still in full gear, with upcoming guest lectures and student events https://www.bellisario.psu.edu/events/event_calendar. This week the Journalism Speakers Forum is hosting Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Susan Snyder. Read more about the event (Oct 14) [here](#).

Keeping Things Interesting

By Chris Skurka, assistant professor in the Department of Film/Video and Media Studies

This semester, I am teaching my courses synchronously, and the biggest challenge I face is keeping things exciting for students. Here are a few activities that I've found work well online (and maybe even better than in-person versions).

Mini Data Collection

I'll ask students to text several people they know to solicit their feedback on a topic. Sometimes the feedback requested is open-ended, but usually I give some parameters (e.g., "Based on what you have heard or seen, describe the presidential debate this week in three words").

You'd be surprised at how quickly students get responses from people, and I usually participate and text people in my social network as well. I used this activity recently when I taught students about the third-person effect (i.e., we tend to think media have bigger effects on other people than on ourselves).

I asked students to text 10 people who use Instagram two questions: 1. How much do you think Instagram influences you personally? 2. How much do you think Instagram influences other people? (with response options ranging from not at all [1] to a great deal [7].)

Students posted their respondents' answers in the Zoom chat, and I entered those responses into an Excel sheet as students posted them. (There's probably a more efficient way to do this, but it worked fine for a class of 20 students). Lo

and behold, our mini data collection activity yielded evidence for the third-person effect! I think this activity does a nice job demonstrating to students the value of collecting data to understand people's perceptions, attitudes, and experiences beyond our own opinions.



Photoshoots

When I teach message framing in the media (i.e., we can emphasize different sides of an issue, which can influence how we think about the causes and consequences of that issue), I ask students to do an at-home photoshoot.

I give them 5-10 minutes to take photos of a few household objects that everyone has lying around: a chair, a book, a glass of water. I create a short Qualtrics survey where students can upload their photos. We then walk through the photos and consider the different ways that the objects have been “framed.”

It provides a nice opportunity to reflect on how we have a tendency to focus on certain aspects of an object when taking a photo (book photos tend to show the cover), but why not frame the object from a different angle? I then connect these ideas to the notion that certain issues tend to be framed in certain ways (e.g., climate change as an environmental issue) but can also be framed to emphasize other facets of the issue (climate change as a national security issue). I also point out how context (e.g., lighting) and personal factors (e.g., photography ability) matter for how we frame an issue. I imagine there are other ways instructors can get creative in asking students to be at-home photographers!

Scavenger Hunts + Flash Presentations

This activity asks students to work in groups to seek and select media artifacts relevant to class discussion, such as news headlines, advertisements, and social media posts. They then analyze the content through the lens of whatever concepts or theory we are discussing and give short presentations (~2 minutes) to share with the class. For example, when I cover fear appeals in health communication, I ask students to select a health issue (e.g. vaping) and then find 2-3 campaign ads about that issue that appeal to fear.

They then have to analyze the content through the lens of theory (does the ad emphasize a threat as well as efficacy around how to take protective action?) to predict whether, according to the theory, the ad would be effective. This kind of activity is great to (a) ensure they understand course concepts and (b) appreciate how concepts and theory have useful applications outside the classroom.



Figure Out the Figure

I often incorporate findings from public opinion polls (like Pew) or research studies into lecture. The problem is that when I show an infographic or visual in my lecture slides, I get the sense that students take the information and conclusions at face value. In other words, they aren't effortfully considering the data being presented. But what if you hide the title of the figure? What if you don't spoon-feed the takeaway?

I tried this for the first-time last semester, and it went over brilliantly in person.

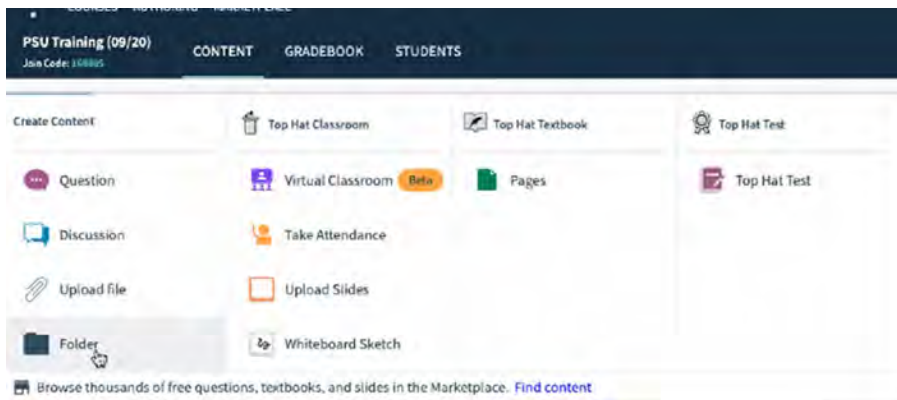
I give students several visualizations from Pew about the topic (e.g., patterns of news consumption in the US), but I omit the figure titles so that students are forced to come to their own conclusions about the gist of the figure. It took students one or two infographics to get the hang of it, but I was impressed at how thoughtful they were and how much discussion they engaged in.

I usually do this activity in a think-pair-share fashion: They start by interpreting the figures individually, and after a few minutes they pair up to talk through their reasoning. I was pleasantly surprised to find that this activity has worked well over Zoom when I put them into breakout rooms. It's a great exercise to encourage students to be critical consumers of data and even get them thinking about how to best visualize their own numbers to tell a clear story.

Top Hat Overview by Shannon Kennan, director of eLearning Initiatives

Top Hat is a tool that can be used simply to do polls and gather student input, or in more complex ways for assessment and live-streaming. It has been used a lot for in-person classes, especially large-enrollment courses, as an alternative for iClickers, but is also being integrated into online courses. Top Hat can be used during class or for homework.

The Top Hat interface looks like a content management system where you can create folders to organize the content and create different types of activities as seen in this image.



Top Hat can be integrated with Canvas and you decide when to import the grades. It will not import anything automatically, the instructor controls this.

Canvas has the *Community* with all kinds of content created by other instructors, Top Hat has a *Marketplace*.

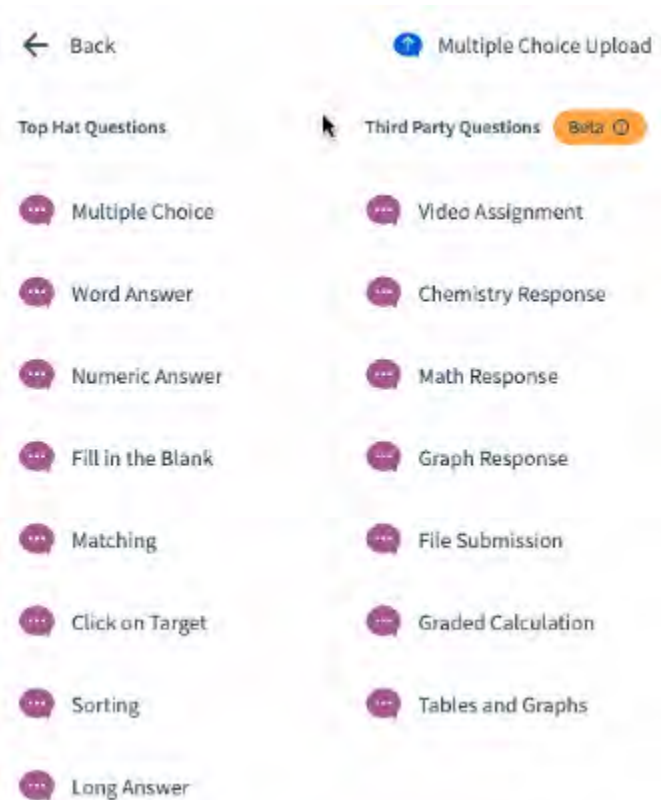
Google Chrome is the recommended browser, Firefox works as well.

Questions & Content

Using **folders** to organize your questions/content is a best practice. You can create a folder by class session or by week which will make it much easier for students to navigate.

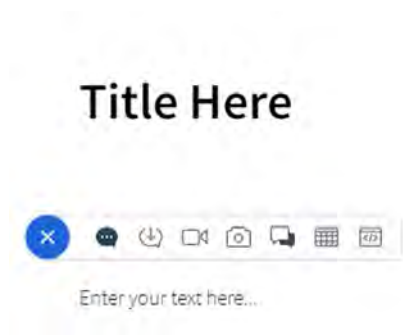
Top Hat has a number of **question types** available that can be used in the polling feature as well as in assessments. The questions can contain images and there can be a timer associated with each question (e.g. providing 20 seconds to respond). You can create questions that have a correct answer as well as ones that don't if you just want to gauge student knowledge or collect feedback. There is an option to allow anonymous responses if desired.

There is an import tool, but it's not very good. The best practice is to copy & paste.



You can upload PPT **files** or any other type of file that you want students to respond to, and you can set a timer for that content. For example, if you post an advertisement that you want students to critique by a certain date, you can have the ad and its associated questions lock on a certain date.

You can create **Pages** in Top Hat using their very basic WYSIWYG interface. This will allow you to insert links, tables, embed videos, or include questions and discussions.

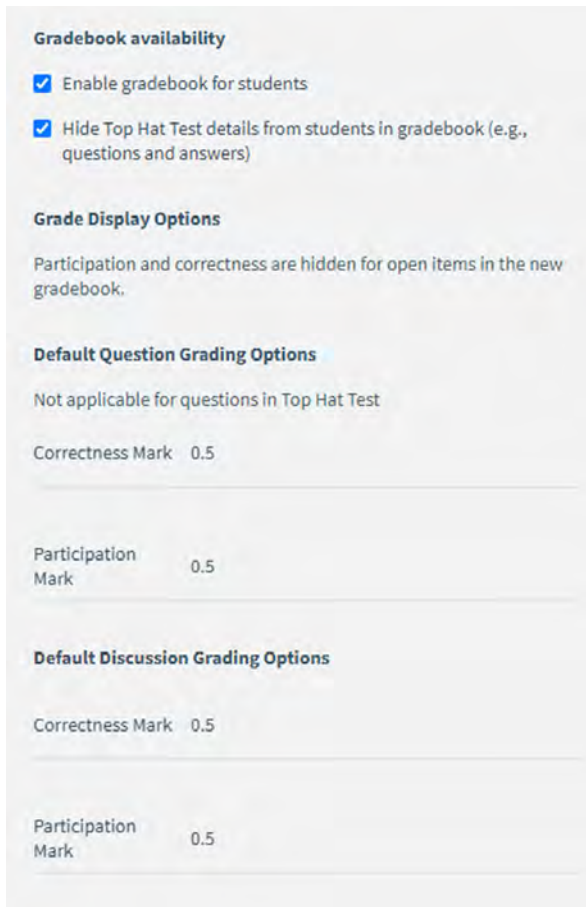


You can **assign content** to all students or only to certain students. That can be helpful if you have a student who missed class and they need to make something up or if you have a student who needs extra help on a certain concept.

In Canvas, you need to *Publish* things in order for students to see it. In Top Hat, you need to *Assign* things in order for students to see it.

Gradebook

Top Hat has a grade book built-in which you can turn on or off that collects student responses so you can keep track of who responded. You can assign point values for each question which can be used for grading/assessment or for participation/attendance. Points can be added specifically for Correctness or Participation depending on your purpose.



Engagement

Students can like or comment on other students' responses and can vote up questions or responses. You can take student responses and organize or sort them.

There are a number of settings available that allow you to control how students can respond. The image below shows you the default settings.

Advanced / Miscellaneous Options

Adapt and customize your Top Hat course to better your needs by toggling on and off certain settings. [Click here for more information on the advanced settings](#)

- Allow students to submit their response immediately when the question is presented
- When presenting, allow students to continue responding to questions when student answer reports are revealed
- Allow students to submit answers via text message (SMS)
- Allow students to submit answers while offline, often used for classrooms with poor connectivity (Offline Mode)
- When presenting, display a question introduction screen before starting the question activity
- If a question is presented multiple times, keep a record of all sessions instead of overwriting previous responses
- Students cannot view the details of a presented question, they can only see the response options (students will need to see the question projected on a screen)
- Students cannot view question details within their gradebook
- Allow this course to receive automatic minor updates for all content imported from the Marketplace.

Top Hat is fully accessible for use with screen readers and has a TA role.

Managing a course is easier with a little help! You may add additional people to your course and determine their access level by assigning one of the following roles:

- **Professor** - Adding another person as a co-professor grants the individual **full access** to your course.
- **Teaching Assistant (TA)** - Adding a TA grants this individual **limited access** to your course. A TA will have access to course content (Classroom, Test, & Textbook) but will not have access to your Course Settings, Gradebook or Student Manager.

Penn State Top Hat available features

- **Take Attendance:** Secure attendance technology for accurate recording of class attendance data.
- **Polls & Quizzes:** Increase student participation during class with the ability to create a variety of interactive content such as polls and quizzes in Top Hat to share seamlessly through Canvas or via a web browser.
- **Live Chat & Discussions:** The live chat functionality integrated directly into the virtual lecture experience allows students to discuss topics and concepts with their peers, and instructors.
- **Labs:** Livestream your lab demonstration while launching real-time questions. Check for comprehension after lab meetings with engaging and accessible assignments.
- **Integration with Canvas:** Instructors can seamlessly synchronize rosters and grades.
- **Learning Insights:** Keep track of how students are doing in your course.
- **Assignments:** Create tailored assignments or upload questions for use in your course.

Features coming soon: Lecture Recordings, Virtual Classroom Streaming, and Slate Course Communications.

Hope you enjoyed this issue. Keep an eye out for Teaching Tuesdays every Tuesday this semester. Want to read an earlier issues? You can find it in the Faculty/Staff Resources: <https://www.bellisario.psu.edu/faculty-staff-resources/teaching-tuesdays>

TEACHING TUESDAYS – Issue #7

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