



Questions: Why Do They Matter?

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In his *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke urged the younger correspondent to learn to love questions, even those that were unanswered. This admonition has stuck with me for several decades, especially in times when I am seeking answers to seemingly tough questions. In thinking about actually *loving* questions, I contemplated my own relationship with them, and I realized that asking questions is one of a teacher's most essential responsibilities. The act of posing a query is one of the characteristics that actually sets this profession apart. Reflecting on this epiphany, I wondered if and how exactly I pose evocative and powerful questions. I decided that there are several opportunities to place a well-developed inquiry, and I wanted to share those. The "Who are you?" questions are ones we direct to ourselves; the "What are you thinking?" questions are ones we need to ask our students; and the "So what?" questions are for students to ask themselves—with a little prompting from us, naturally.

The most important questions: Who are you?

So much of teaching centers around the relationships we develop with our students. We start with our content; it's our reason for being. We teach because we want to grow the next cadre of scientists, teachers, lawyers, engineers, and doctors. What we teach is incredibly critical, but I sometimes wonder if we are focused enough on *who* we teach. Here are a few questions I have thought about

in my own contemplation of students and my relationships with them: To what degree do we see our students as unique individuals? How do we invest time in seeking to know them and understand a bit about their lives, beliefs, and aspirations? How do we ask, "Who are you?" How important is asking to our profession? How important is it to our students? How do we convey that we are invested in them as the next generation of torchbearers for our work? How do we witness their struggles without fixing their problems? How do we get to know them?

The probing questions: What are you thinking?

Getting to know our students serves many purposes; one of the most powerful is laying the foundation for questions that center on how our students are making sense of the content we share. When we invest time in understanding who our students are, we can incorporate that understanding as we pose questions that probe their relationship with what they are learning. By looking, in part, through their lens, we can pose additional questions designed to deepen their understanding and thinking about the topic. Some examples of these questions might be: How does this make sense to you? What is your understanding of the content? How would you describe this to another person? Why are we studying this content? What is the logical next step? How would you compare this topic to a topic you know well? How is this similar to what we talked about earlier? How is it different? How satisfied are you with your assignments, workload, experiment results, and so on?

The personal relevancy questions: So what?

Delving deeply with our students to ascertain their understanding of course content leads to the final type of questions—those that aim to assist students in taking the next giant step. This next step moves them from what they have learned into what they do with what they have learned. So much of the time, our heads are filled with content knowledge and skills. How we make sense of this knowledge and apply it determines the degree to which that content takes on new life of its own. The question "So what?" begs to be answered, as it prods the learner to think about the following: What am I going to do with this? How does it change my life? What difference will it make in the way I see the world? What difference will it make in the way I approach the world? What will I do differently? How does this change or affirm who I am? How will I move

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- Write directly to the audience, remembering that this is a newsLETTER.
- Keep the article short; generally between 2 and 3 double-spaced pages.
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Laptop Zones

Laptops and tablet devices of various sorts are everywhere in college classrooms at this point. Students use them to take notes. Keying is quicker than writing notes longhand, and typed notes are subsequently easier to read. Faculty have two legitimate worries; students are using their devices for activities other than note-taking, and bright screens filled with colorful graphics can distract more than just the student who's not taking notes. The authors of the article, "The Impact of Laptop-free Zones on Student Performance and Attitudes in Large Lectures," think this is an especially serious problem in lecture halls where students sit close together and it's all but impossible for the teacher to control who's doing what with their electronic devices.

They wondered whether laptop zones might be a solution. To test their theory, they designated laptop zones in two sections of a large, introductory biology course. Two other sections where students sat without seating restrictions acted as the control.

The authors' analysis is well-designed and creative. It's explained in detail in this research article. Here's a rundown of their findings:

- There was no difference in attendance rates between the unrestricted seating sections and those with laptop zones; nor was there any difference in the number of students who used laptops to take notes.
- The percentage of laptop users who were off-task (that is, who had non-course content on their screens, as observed from the back of the room) was significantly higher in the zoned than in the control sections. Forty percent of the students off-task were using social media, including Facebook, instant messaging, and video chat.
- The average percentage of laptops that were off-task at any given

time during the lecture was 17 percent in the control sections. This observational-based percentage is lower than student self-reported percentages, as documented by other research.

- Free-response survey questions gave students the opportunity to indicate why they selected to take notes by hand or on the computer. The most frequent response among those taking notes by hand was that the process "facilitates learning." Those using laptops most frequently reported that it was "convenient."
- As for performance: "Academic performance, based on exam points earned, was not significantly different for paper users in zoned and control sections, indicating laptop use did not impair the overall achievement of surrounding students. However, there was a correlation between exam performance and note-taking preference: paper note-takers scored significantly higher and laptop users scored significantly lower than predicted by pre-class academic indicators" (p. 1300).
- Students in all sections were opposed to banning laptops. Only 10 percent supported that policy. When asked about restricting laptop use to designated zones, 50 percent of the note-takers in the control sections supported that policy; 82 percent of those in the zoned classes did. "After exposure to zoning the preference of both paper and laptop users shifts significantly in favor of zoning" (p. 1305).

Here's the research team's overall conclusion: "Although the creation of a laptop-free zone did not affect overall student performance, zoning had a positive impact on the class environment and student attitudes. Although zoned laptop users engaged in more off-task

Editor's note: There are two articles in this issue on rubrics. First, Raz Kerwin shares how he engages students (via Google Docs) in the creation of assignment rubrics, while the following piece by Perry Shaw focuses on how faculty can improve their use of rubrics. Both articles reflect the growing interest in and use of these more elaborate delineations of grading criteria.

Involving Students in Rubric Creation and Using Google Docs to Make It Happen

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Wide consensus confirms the usefulness of rubrics. For instructors, rubrics expedite grading with standards; at the same time, they reinforce learning objectives and standardize course curricula. For students, rubrics provide formative guidelines for assignments while—ideally—spurring reflection and self-assessment.

Rubrics can do these wonderful things for students only if students actually look at, understand, and use them. Many of us have seen students do just the opposite—file them away or, even worse, toss them out. How can instructors ensure that students engage with rubrics when they work on their assignments?

One suggestion: Let students collaboratively build the rubric. People (yes, undergraduates are people too!) often do not value that which has been freely given; however, they value highly what they have worked to create. In my experience as an undergraduate-level technical writing instructor, I have found that students who have developed the assignment rubric are much more likely to use it.

Ending up with a rubric that accurately reflects the effort and complexity of the subject material requires careful instructor guidance. The first step is imparting a working body of knowledge. Students must be able to descriptively evaluate what makes a “good” or “bad” assignment submission. Once students have this working knowledge and realize that they can determine their assignment criteria, the rubric becomes a powerful tool to use when completing

an assignment.

I use Google Docs to facilitate this collaborative rubric-building. As many of you know, Google Docs is a multiauthor online collaborative document space. As you might imagine, a live document with 25 editors can quickly become chaos. But if this chaos is constructively controlled, the end result can be amazing. My students typically draft along parallel lines of thought, build upon each other's work, make corrections, and ultimately select the “best” version of work, all in real time. The end result is often a very high bandwidth human discussion about the classroom subject material, wherein metrics for success and failure are critically engaged by students. In my experience, I regularly end up with a student-created rubric much like the ones I've created—but with a key difference: students are full stakeholders in the rubric. They know exactly what a rubric is, what it's good for, and how to use it.

I'd like to share what I've learned that makes this a manageable and successful process. First off, you need to get the class on board with the importance of rubrics. Students will follow your lead here; they pay attention to how you run the class. When they realize they have the chance to develop a rubric that you'll be using to grade the assignment, you'll have plenty of student buy-in.

You'll need to set up the Google Doc, assigning access and editing capabilities to the students. At this point, you'll need to decide whether or not the students will be anonymous. Both options are possible with Google Docs. In my experience, anonymity does not hamper the collaborative process, provided that the instructor is present and offers a moderating influence. Occasionally a

student who aspires to amuse the class may post something silly; I've found, though, that once the initial novelty wears off, the silliness does too.

To get started, I find it's best if you “seed” the rubric with the learning dimensions you want assessed, and the categories by which they will be judged. In my technical writing courses, the learning dimensions include items such as formatting, organization, grammar, mechanics, and reader effect; the assessment categories can vary depending on how you want to score assignments—from weak to strong, letter grades, or some other assessment criteria. Following this framework, students fill in the details that make an assignment “good” or “bad.”

As students begin to collaborate, they will need guidance. Their first inclination is to use very generic terms. For example, in a technical writing formatting section of the rubric, students may initially put something like “poor formatting.” I use this as a teaching moment. I ask them what qualities, specifically, make for poor formatting in a document. How will we know when we see poor formatting? What are the tell-tale signs? I remind them that opinions are often subjective and fluid, but that grades should be based on objective standards and identified best practices. They may consult the textbook or lecture notes. Putting students in the position of an evaluator helps to challenge them. An assignment isn't graded as “weak” because evaluators simply know a weak assignment when they see one; an assignment is graded as “weak” when it fails to meet specific criteria.

Reenvisioning Rubrics: A Few Brief Suggestions

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Linda Suskie's *Assessing Student Learning* documents a wide variety of common assessment errors. They result from the subjective nature of grades in all but the most factual subjects. Many failures point to the need for more objectivity and a better system of accountability, including leniency, generosity, and severity errors; halo, contamination, similar-to-me, and first-impression biases; and that most common of errors, rater drift—that is, the unintentional redefining of scoring criteria as the marker grows tired.

There is no perfect solution to the challenges of meaningful grading, but many of us have found that rubrics help move us toward greater objectivity. They do so by breaking the desired outcomes into individual elements. However, when rubrics rely on general terms like *excellent*, *good*, *fair*, and *poor*, they can still be highly subjective. Those terms encourage instructors merely to get a general “feel” for a student’s work and, based on this initial impression, subconsciously (or consciously) assess accordingly across items in the rubric. More detailed descriptions of these terms can improve outcomes, but those explanations can become rigid and confusing.

After applying the following suggestions, I find that students don’t repeat the same mistakes as often as they did when I used more generic terms on my rubrics:

1. Replace evaluative headings with descriptive terms: for example, “clearly evident,” “evident but in need of some development,” “evident but in need of a lot of development,” and “not evident.” Students seem to understand these descriptors better than more evaluative headings.

2. Use the headings “extensive treatment,” “moderate treatment,” and “no treatment” when the assignment focuses on a dialogue between theory and practice. For example, when looking at the cultural and social factors that influence a specific case study, there are multiple areas in which a student might engage with the theory; it is not necessary to address every area in every case.

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Assessment should rest on the areas selected and the balance between the areas addressed. There’s more subjectivity involved here so I don’t regularly use terms such as these.

3. Provide the rubric in advance. I know there is significant debate on this point; some decry the possibility of undermining creativity and initiation if students approach the rubric in a rigid and mechanistic fashion. However, since I began providing the rubric up front, student complaints about assessments have dramatically declined. Many students have found the rubrics are helpful guidelines that develop their critical writing skills.
4. Include a comments section following the rubric table, and provide more positive than negative comments. Students are more willing to look at areas in need of improvement if they sense they have made progress on the journey. As a basic rule, I have found that my students can only cope with a maximum of three negative comments on their work. If students are flooded with too many suggestions, they end up ignoring them all.

5. Find positive ways to give a negative critique. For example, “The next time you do work like this I would urge you to consider the following . . .”
6. Don’t place a grade anywhere on the paper or the rubric. My experience has been that the moment students see the grade, that’s all they think about. They pay more attention to the grade than to the feedback you’ve provided. We have to give grades eventually; but if we can delay this, then there is a better chance that students will focus on the feedback.
7. Have students self-assess using the rubric. The ability to make judgments about your own work is an essential metacognitive skill. With practice, student self-assessment skills can grow. This also has the side benefit of letting you know the extent to which you have adequately taught not merely the content of the course but also the methodological elements. For example, through a student self-assessment you are able to see whether they are able to judge whether they have clearly stated their thesis or provided a critical reflection on differing perspectives of an issue.
8. Require students to respond to your assessment of their work, describing ways in which they might do similar work differently in future. You could do this before giving them the final grade. One of our faculty members includes student responses to the assessment as 10 percent of the final course grade. Approaches like this encourage a detailed reading of the comments you’ve provided.

Rubrics aren’t perfect, but they make it easier to accomplish the key purpose of assessment, which is learning. Any tool we use should be designed so that it strengthens the quality of students’ learning. 🌱

Encouraging Students to Think Beyond the Course Material: The Benefits of Using Reflective Journals

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Research has documented the value of reflective journaling in both face-to-face and online courses. It is especially beneficial for beginning students in first-year seminar courses. But I hear you asking, “What professor has the time read a whole stack of journals?” And I would have to tell you that in my experience as a professor teaching an early childhood development course at our community college, one of the most valuable and *least* time-consuming assignments that I give my students are these journals.

Although I often hear a collective sigh from students on the first day of class, an epiphany generally occurs by mid-semester, with students commenting on how much they enjoyed responding to the journal questions. Could this change result from the fact that journal reflections are not mandatory in the course, but an optional way to earn points? Possibly. But I have to believe that students choose to write reflective responses because it gives them the chance to freely express their thoughts.

My students complete their journal responses on biweekly due dates and submit them via Blackboard. My goal is to provide a way for students to think and respond more personally to issues,

theories, and classroom activities. I don’t want them to just regurgitate course information, but to look beyond course content to their own experiences and to use those experiences to question the content and challenge their own thinking.

The assignment structure is simple. I propose a question drawn from the content we are discussing in class; students write a two- to three-paragraph response. I tell students that I don’t correct grammar, and there is no right or wrong answer—but because they are college students, I expect responses in complete, coherent sentences. What they write is private. I only respond to journal reflections if I think there is a strong reason to do so. However, if the student wants feedback, he or she can note that in the reflection and I will respond. Each journal reflection adds five points to the student’s final grade, but the overall benefits far outweigh any points earned.

Journaling can be beneficial in any college course, not just for those who are starting college or taking education courses. So often we think of journaling as only being used in writing courses, but there are opportunities to use it in many courses. It provides a forum via which students can personally respond without fear of being challenged or ridiculed for their ideas. It’s a way of communicating that works for those students who are reluctant to participate in class discussions, but still feel strongly

about the issues and topics of the course. Journaling isn’t just for students, either; I journal weekly. It provides a catharsis that allows me to introspectively explore my classroom practices and teaching style. It was especially beneficial for me during my first years as a new teacher.

What do I want students to learn from journaling? I start with what they tell me they’ve learned from the assignment. Not surprisingly, most students say they weren’t crazy about the idea when I introduced it—but once they completed their first response, they began to look forward to the next one. They report that journaling gives them the freedom to express their own thoughts and opinions without judgments and with a points benefit for doing so. One student, commented that “journaling was a nice change” and allowed him to respond to the content in more meaningful ways.

If we tell students we are interested in their ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints, then we need to not only listen to those who express them in class but also read the responses of those who write. If they voluntarily take time to respond, then we owe them the time it takes to read what they’ve written. Besides that, I have found that reading their responses gives me a personal insight into how each student understands material and responds to it. I learn about them and from them. It’s an educational experience for them, and for me. 🌱

LAPTOP ZONES FROM PAGE 2

behavior, that wasn’t associated with a decrease in performance.” They offer an important caveat: “Because the variable

we manipulated in this study was zoning, not laptop use, the underlying causes for why laptop users underperformed are not known” (p. 1307).

Reference: Aguilar-Roca, N.M., Williams, A.E., and O’Dowd, D.K., (2012). The impact of laptop-free zones on student performance and attitudes in large lectures. *Computers & Education*, 59, 1300–1308. 🌱

Developing Self-Regulated Learning Skills: A Unique Approach

New college students come to postsecondary education with some accurate expectations. They expect that college will be harder than high school. Most anticipate having to study more. But they also expect that those study approaches that served them well in high school will work equally well in college. For many, those first couple of months in college are a rude awakening.

Beginning students—and many others in the college ranks—are not well prepared to successfully manage their own learning. “College students must go beyond surface-level learning, taking ownership of learning by choosing and using the best resources and strategies for the task, as well as reflecting upon and monitoring their progress toward learning goals” (p. 271). Success in college depends on developing the skill sets associated with self-regulated learning. Students who have and use these skills increase their chances of doing well.

To remediate what beginning (and other) students are missing, the faculty and institutional response is to tell—and sometimes teach—students about those skills that make success in college more likely. That approach doesn’t always work well, for two reasons. First, students don’t always listen all that closely to advice on how to study when it’s offered by persons who sound and often look like parents; and second, it’s not enough to know what self-directed learners do—students have to *use* those skills.

Consider how this approach might succeed where how-to-study admonitions fail. It starts with a first-year seminar program, that includes both instruction on learning strategies and—more importantly—a seminar assignment called a Strategy Project Assignment. It’s a “multistep project requiring students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their newly learned strategies

as they prepare for a test in a course in which they are currently enrolled” (pp. 272–273). A copy of the actual assignment appears in an appendix at the end of the article. The assignment includes creating a study game plan, meeting with the instructor about the exam, using the reading review activities

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that have been covered in the course, using active note-taking strategies, implementing a choice of appropriate exam study strategies, taking the test, predicting the grade, and then—once the test is returned—writing a paper that reflects on one’s own exam preparation and performance. Students must provide evidence that all these activities were completed, and this evidence is evaluated to determine the overall assignment grade.

This is one of those “authentic assignments” where students do work that requires the application and use of course content. It relies on what’s called “deliberative practice.” “In order for a person to achieve mastery levels, practice of the skill in an authentic context is necessary” (p. 272).

After the exam, students in five course sections wrote reflection papers; an analysis of the papers revealed five themes. The first, and “perhaps most important” (p. 274), involved the value students placed on the assignment, after initially unenthusiastic responses. “This project has to be the most eye-opening project of my entire semester,” one

student wrote (p. 274). Second, students commented on the transition from high school to college and their vague expectations of what doing well in college required. Many also wrote about their reluctance to change the strategies that had served them in high school. They didn’t want to use the proposed strategies and didn’t think they would work—but they did; 45 percent of the students reported an increase of one letter grade or higher on the test they prepared for in the project. Another 26 percent reported smaller improvement gains. The few that reported declines attributed them to personal circumstances, not the project. Perhaps more significant than grade gains were the changes in self-efficacy that resulted from the assignment. Another regular theme addressed students’ increased confidence about taking exams; they described feeling prepared and able to handle exam questions. Finally, many of the students reported that the assignment had caused them to make permanent changes in how they prepare for exams across the board.

An assignment like this is perfectly suited for a first-year seminar course, but as the author points out, it can be adapted for use in a variety of courses—most appropriately in those regularly taken by beginning students or in those courses where students’ preexisting approaches tend not to result in good grades and successful learning. The assignment could also work well in those first courses in a major where students need to learn the ins and outs of studying a particular kind of content.

Reference: Steiner, H.H. (2016). The strategy project: Promoting self-regulated learning through an authentic assignment. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 28 (2), 271–282. 🌿

Questions about Digital Technology and Higher Education

An interesting essay in the *Journal of Management Education* highlights “mounting evidence in the cognitive neuroscience literature that digital technology is restructuring the way our students read and think” (p. 374). It proceeds to explore the implications of this premise for higher education generally and for teachers more specifically.

It’s a fascinating article—great for faculty reading groups—that reaffirms higher education’s special role in developing students’ deep thinking and analytical skills, mostly through reading. “No matter what label you affix, that is, reflexivity, critical thinking, learning, creativity, expert knowing, *mastering depth* remains the university’s sweet spot. Depth is the generative midwife of knowledge and human ingenuity. But like reading, it is not stamped into our genes. It is by no means a sure thing. And powerful cultural imperatives make it clear that the university’s brand of depth is not shared by everyone” (p. 389).

But it may be that what the article does best is to raise questions. Here are some examples:

- Can a young lifetime skimming “the shallows” be reengineered in four fleeting undergraduate years?
- Is the classroom devolving into a face-off between two differently wired brains and epistemologies?
- Will the latest generation of faculty—themselves reared on digital technology—carry on the hallowed slow, sustained reading ethos of the university?
- Are senior (analogic) faculty up to speed on new media reading and writing?
- Is “depth” itself in jeopardy?

Two key points are made at the end of the article. First, this does not need to become a zero-sum game of book literacy versus digital literacy; students can learn to be literate in both. However, we should not kid ourselves as to the challenges involved. “Perhaps you can lead a millennial to the library, but you

cannot force her or him to read—deeply, anyway” (p. 390).

Second, our understanding of technology needs to be nuanced. It is not a neutral phenomenon. The devices we use have been designed by us, but now their design plays an important role in shaping us. As we think about digital classrooms, we must ask if and how they serve our students’ interests and learning needs.

“As we have seen, a new generation of scanning techniques afford us a more sophisticated picture of how people learn, but questions far outnumber answers at this stage” (p. 388).

Reference: Cavanaugh, J.M., Giapponi, C.C., and Golden, T.D. (2016). Digital technology and student cognitive development: The neuroscience of the university classroom. *Journal of Management Education*, 40 (4), 374–397. 🌱

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forward? What will be my next steps? What shifts in my life are occurring because of my shifts in thinking? Who am I now?

Final thoughts

Teaching offers countless opportunities for us to ask, inquire, probe, delve, dig, and uncover. But there are just as many opportunities for us to tell, recite, inform, lecture, share, and elucidate. In writing this, I am

challenging myself and my colleagues to think about all those questions that are waiting to be posed. They are questions that can be loved, but not unless they are asked. 🌱

INVOLVING STUDENTS FROM PAGE 3

When the student-created rubric is proclaimed to be “done,” you’ll likely need to do some copyediting and educational quality control. Ultimate responsibility for the grading criteria used on a given assignment rests with you.

When students are involved in the

creation of assignment rubrics, something profound occurs. You’re demonstrating in a very real way that the tools for success reside in their own hands. You’re empowering students to take ownership of the measures of success and failure, instead of being passive agents acted upon by the teacher, you’re turning them into active and engaged scholars with the ability and

means to control their own academic destinies. And, in all probability, your students will enjoy using a powerful multiauthor collaborative tool such as Google Docs to generate a document; it really is kind of cool to see so much cognitive activity happening all at once on a single page! 🌱

Supervising Interns at a Distance

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Internships are widely valued by students, faculty, and employers. A well-designed internship experience can be a powerful learning opportunity, full of chances to apply knowledge and skills, work collaboratively with others, and develop career interests. As a faculty member and codirector of my department's internship program, I help lead an internship program designed to give students meaningful professional experiences closely tied to their academic program and supervised by a faculty member. Recently, my codirector and I became concerned that our students at more distant internship locations might be at a disadvantage compared to our students placed more locally. It seemed that distant interns experienced less close supervisory relationships with their faculty supervisor, which might negatively affect student learning. As a result, we developed some strategies to enhance our supervision of interns at a distance.

In our program, we help students to secure internship placements with very little geographic restriction. Students intern in our local community, but also throughout the entire United States and occasionally internationally. When students are placed reasonably close to our campus (i.e., within 80 miles), they are visited by their faculty supervisor twice during the semester. They also return to campus for two separate days of activities, including professional development programming, group supervision, and a final presentation about their internship experience. Approximately 25 percent of our students complete their internships more than 80 miles from campus. This group does not receive in-person site visits, and they aren't expected to attend on-campus professional development days. As a result, we were concerned that faculty

supervision may have been less close and effective and that these students may have been at risk of underperforming during internship.

This was motivation to proceed with two changes which would enhance our supervision of the more distant interns. The first change related to site visits. Originally, we had simply used phone calls to replace site visits for distant interns. Now, we conduct "virtual site visits" by using a variety of flexible technology. We have face-to-face conversations with interns and site supervisors using WebEx, Skype, or a similar platform. We encourage interns to give us a "tour" of their site using videos or photos. When possible, we ask interns to share a video so that we can observe them engaging in an internship task. Because of variations across sites with respect to technology availability and confidentiality concerns, flexibility is key. Each "virtual site visit" is different from the next. Nevertheless, we have found that these strategies make our communications more personal and thorough. Face-to-face technologies allow for nonverbal cues to contribute to communications. The use of photos and videos helps the faculty member to more thoroughly understand the internship site and the intern's tasks. Consequently, the faculty member's relationship with both the intern and the site supervisor is strengthened. We are better able to provide support to interns who might be having difficulties.

The second change we made applied to all interns, both local and distant. We wanted to increase the frequency and timeliness of communications between interns and faculty members. Previously, interns completed a weekly reflection assignment. In these, interns often wrote about significant events or struggles they were experiencing. Due to the weekly nature of the assignment, however, they wrote about things that had happened several days before. The faculty member would subsequently read and grade the assignment, providing feedback and

coaching—but by then, the incident was often long past. To address this issue, we created a new assignment using the journal feature in our campus's learning management system, which allows for private communication between intern and faculty member. Students now write about key events as they occur; faculty respond more quickly than before, and students respond to that feedback. For both distant and local interns, supervisory relationships have become more responsive, spontaneous, and targeted to student needs. Of course, not all students engage productively with the journal or the feedback faculty provide. But for many students, this tool has helped to facilitate meaningful faculty-student relationships with a strong mentoring component.

Both faculty observations and student grades suggest that these changes have been advantageous for interns at distant sites. Under the old procedures, local interns' average grades were higher than distant interns', both on specific assignments and in the overall course. After the change, the pattern was nearly reversed, with distant interns' average grades higher than local interns' average grades in six of the nine categories we use for comparison. Given the small sample sizes, we don't want to over-interpret these grade differences. Nevertheless, both the grade pattern and faculty experience suggest that implementing supervision journals and virtual site visits has helped to minimize the disadvantages of distant internship placements.

If your students engage in field-based experiences very far from campus—internships, co-ops, student teaching, and the like—I offer these strategies as ways to enhance the field experiences of students at a distance. 🌱