Resource Guide

Active Learning in Socially Distanced Classrooms

Many instructors are being tasked with redesigning their courses to accommodate new social distancing (or physical distancing) guidelines. This time of pedagogical revision can be used to reevaluate each instructional method instructors are currently using, from high stakes assessments, content delivery methods and formative in-class activities. While at first glance, guidelines of social distancing appear to conflict with active learning techniques, further consideration reveals that active leaning can be accomplished in socially distanced classrooms with some planning.

(following social distancing guidelines) can allow students to connect the new information with their existing understanding. Another common technique is to have students summarize their understanding of a topic/concept in a short essay. Instructors could give students 3-5 minutes to summarize a topic in their own words which can be shared with the whole group or exchanged electronically to stimulate further discussion. This tends to reveal misconceptions or gaps in understanding to both the student and the instructor.

Informal exchange of information between students

Informal exchange of information or experiences is usually best achieved by small-group discussion and may pose the greatest challenge to finding alternatives. Instructors could consider having students participate in collaborative work via shared documents (such as GoogleDocs), or live group chats. Students are posed a scenario or prompt in class and must respond on a shared Googledoc. Following the exchange, the instructor could ask for volunteers to summarize the discussion that occurred in the small group to stimulate a full class discussion, if necessary. This technique allows for participation of students who are in the classroom as well as students who are distance learning synchronously. For large enrollment classes, consider having a teaching assistant or learning assistant manage the shared documents.

In sum, instructors could use this experience to evaluate whether their current instructional methods are the most eff