These notes are not exhaustive but address three important pedagogical issues that provided focus for part of our conversation. These include many suggestions that came up during the session as well as some additional best practices.

**Issue 1: Using asynchronous discussions effectively**
Asynchronous discussions are very different from real-time discussions that happen in a face-to-face class. We need to keep these differences in mind as we plan to use asynchronous discussions in our courses.

**Differences in time**
While a discussion in a face-to-face class meeting unfolds over a matter of minutes, an asynchronous discussion unfolds over days. Students will be logging into the discussion at different times, and they will need more time to develop their responses. This means that instead of having several small moments of discussion as you would in a face-to-face class (or a discussion for each class day), you might have a single discussion that runs for a week or more.

**Differences in student participation**
In class, we often rely on student volunteers to drive a discussion. The interactions in those kinds of discussions is often between the instructor and those volunteers. In an asynchronous online discussion, you can ensure greater equity of participation by requiring students to respond. You may find that students who do not volunteer to speak in class will make significant and thoughtful contributions to the discussion.

**Differences in instructor feedback**
Because a face-to-face discussion unfolds in “real time,” the instructor is often deeply involved in the interaction and can quickly respond to students’ thinking. Asynchronous discussions tend to unfold among students first, and the instructor can step back and let their thinking develop before sharing more expert thinking.

**Some best practices for asynchronous discussions**
1. Communicate your expectations for how you expect students to contribute to the discussion. Students need to know why they are engaging in the discussion, how they can work effectively in that space, and how their work will be assessed. This means that you want to briefly describe the purpose of the discussion, give students a prompt or question to respond to, and guidance for how long their posts should be and what kind of posts they should be writing.

2. Communicate an explicit timeline for the discussion. Students need a date and time by which they should make an initial post and also a deadline for replying to their classmates posts. So, for example, you might post readings or a lecture on Monday, have students read those materials and make an initial post to a discussion by 11:59 pm on Tuesday, and then reply to one classmate’s post by 11:59 pm on Thursday.

3. If you want all students to participate, offer low-stakes credit for discussions. If discussions are contributing significantly to students’ learning in your course, you should signal that by
offering credit for that work. If you had a participation grade in the face-to-face portion of your course, that may carry over to participation in online discussions. Keep in mind that if online discussions are “volunteer-only,” you will likely see low levels of participation.

4. Monitor discussions and redirect if necessary, but don’t reply to every individual post. It is not productive (and likely not possible) for you to respond to everything each student posts. You only need to intervene during a discussion if students engage in inappropriate behavior or if a discussion threatens to become derailed. Otherwise, wait until students have had the opportunity to post and reply to each other. Once that has happened, take some time to read the discussion as a whole and choose two or three key themes that you will respond to and craft a reply. You might also respond to any misunderstandings that became apparent in the discussion. This way you are using your expertise to bring closure and respond to student thinking.

Issue 2: Ensuring equity and access
While the idea of being able to hold regular face-to-face class meetings is appealing, the reality for many of our students is that they do not have broadband internet access or the kind of learning environment they would need to make the most of these sessions. We need to keep this in mind as we are planning. This does not mean that we can never offer any opportunities for students to make contact with each other or with us in real time, but it does mean that we want to make sure that students who don’t have good access to the tools that allow for that synchronous contact aren’t severely disadvantaged in our courses.

Some best practices to ensure equity and access
1. Ask your students what kind of access they have, what tools are available to them, and what kind of learning environment they are working in. There may be some cases where all the students in a given class are in the right conditions to work with us synchronously. However, there will also be cases where some (or many) students simply can’t be present for class meetings. In those cases, make sure that you record sessions and make them available to all students afterward. Offer to follow up with students who are unable to attend meetings.

2. Instead of real-time class meetings, use Zoom to hold “live” office hours. If you discover that students don’t have access to the technology or the environment that would make it possible for them to participate in a class meeting using Zoom, you can still use that tool to make yourself available to them. You might want to hold these office hours once a week during your regular class meeting time and possibly offer a different time as well to accommodate students whose schedules have changed since remote learning began.

3. Be flexible. All of us are learning a great deal as the shift to remote learning unfolds, and part of what we learn may be that students are struggling to access the resources they need to be successful. You may find that you need to offer additional support beyond what we would in a typical semester. You may also find that you simply need to do less than you thought you would do in your course because some students are struggling simply to access the course resources. Be willing to learn from your experiences (and those of your students) and make adjustments. And keep the lines of communication open: tell students about any changes you make and explain that you are trying to facilitate their learning. They will thank you.
Issue 3: Attending to students’ mental health and emotional well-being

This is a trying and stressful time for all of us. We know that many of our students already struggle with anxiety, and the current situation may exacerbate those conditions. We should be paying attention to signals of distress from our students and referring them to campus resources, as we would under normal circumstances. All of the services that students can access on campus are available virtually. The Supporting Our Students page on the University’s COVID-19 website tells students how they can access resources.

We should also keep in mind, though, that our students may not express their fears or anxieties directly. This doesn’t mean that they don’t need our support and guidance. Instead, it may mean that we need to make sure we clearly tell them we care about their well-being, that we need to help them feel connected to us and to their classmates, and that we need to stay in close touch.

Some best practices to attend to students’ mental health and emotional well-being

1. Follow up with students who haven’t been active in your course. Many students have had to relocate, and in some cases, they are not in a stable environment yet. If students have not been in contact with you or have not yet engaged in course work, follow up with them individually. Emphasize that you want to make sure they are ok.

2. Tell students that you care about their well-being. Even when we communicate to students that we care about their learning, sometimes we don’t directly tell them that we care about them. It is important for students to feel this now, and letting them know that you care also serves as an invitation for them to reach out to you if they aren’t doing well. If that happens, you can point them to the resources they need.

3. Be flexible. To ease the transition to remote learning, we need to be willing to make changes that can ease some of the emotional burdens on us and on our students. This doesn’t have to mean lowering our standards, but it does mean allowing more leeway than we normally might, at least in the short term, for deadlines or late work.