

Jessica Nevitt
Campus: Bloomington
Title: Lecturer
Department: Professional Skills, Kelley School of Business

The 2020-2021 academic year was extraordinary, to say the least. The massive health, social and political changes that formed the environment around students and educators this year certainly brought about hardships. However, these changes also brought opportunities, growth, and changed my teaching in a profound and permanent way. I started the academic year with fears of the unknown, and I ended the year with a renewed sense of community and appreciation for the resilience of my fellow faculty and students.

In March 2020, when faculty and students were asked to go online to finish the semester, adrenaline kicked in, and I was able to finish my courses on a high note while learning on the fly how to imbed video into Canvas, use Zoom and Kaltura for the first time, and how to communicate clearly and effectively with my students in new and different ways. Over the summer, when I was assigned both in-person hybrid and online sections in the Fall, I found myself wondering how I could possibly teach in both modalities in an effective way. I still had so much to learn.

The apprehension I felt walking into the classroom fully masked in August 2020, signing in to Zoom, and teaching a half-full classroom melted away as I heard my students' expressions of thanks every day we met together. In the past, I always got a few thank you's from students on the first and last days of class, but this was a constant feature of my classes all year long. The chorus of "thank you's" I got after class was over every day both in person and online made me happy to be there, and motivated me to do my best work.

I also learned to be a more agile and resourceful teacher. I had taught online before and I've taught in the classroom for over a decade, but this year was different. The way I approached classroom activities, discussion, and class participation had to change to meet students where they were. Where students were was often in quarantine, fearful over the health of family members and friends, facing Wi-Fi connectivity issues, experiencing anxiety about social and political changes, and suffering from Zoom fatigue. My attendance, late submission, and on-camera policies needed to be flexible to help my students meet those challenges, while still maintaining high academic standards.

When technology didn't cooperate, I often had to switch delivery and teaching methods to suit the circumstances. One day, with an IT professional unexpectedly working on my classroom computer while I taught, I switched the entire lesson from a planned lecture and discussion to an active learning activity in Zoom breakout rooms utilizing student laptops. That unplanned activity turned out to be a beneficial learning experience that I repeated in future classes. Due to the social landscape of this last year, another unplanned classroom discussion about implicit bias and being an ally will also form the basis of future classroom discussions and lectures.

Even this year challenged me professionally like no other year, I am grateful for the ways that it made me grow. I became a more creative and resilient instructor and person. I also saw clearly the vibrant and flexible community of students and educators that I am privileged to work with.