

Ep. 066: Fall 2020 Student Check-In

Podcast: <https://ProDev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2020/ep066.shtml>

As an extraordinary semester wraps up, we check in with three undergraduate students from Illinois State about their experiences learning in the age of COVID-19. They highlight what's worked in their classes this semester, what instructors have done to help them to succeed, and how the new tools we've all had to embrace - things like Zoom, recorded lectures, and other apps - have actually offered some expanded opportunities. They also explore some surprising ways they connect with other students. Plus, they weigh in on synchronous versus asynchronous learning and how those insights have impacted their choices of classes for the spring semester.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there I'm Jim,

CLAIRE: I'm Claire,

MEGAN: I'm Megan,

MICAH: and I'm Micah

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching

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JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology here at Illinois State University, I'm Jim Gee it's the end or nearing the end of the fall 2020 semester. So, we wanted to check in again with some students who we talked to early in the semester to see how things are going. So, joining me today, I'm excited to have you all back joining me today. Let's start with Claire. Hi Claire.

CLAIRE: Hi Jim. How are you doing?

JIM: I'm doing great. And I should mention Claire is, uh, in the College of Business she's a marketing sophomore. Right? I think you're all sophomores.

CLAIRE: Yes.

JIM: Okay, and then we also have Micah. Hi Micah, how, are you good? How are you?

MICAH: I'm doing, I'm hanging in there.

JIM: Um, and I want to mainly... We're going to dive in more depth about how are you doing because I think everyone's interested in hearing that? And you're in Family and Consumer Sciences, is that right?

MICAH: Yes. I am okay.

JIM: And last but not least we have Megan. Hi Megan, you're in Communication Sciences and Disorders. Right?

MEGAN: Yes, that is correct.

JIM: All right, well thank you all for coming back, um, and I'll say off the top we will have a link to our past episode, and I really encourage people to listen to it if they haven't because we had a really good discussion, when we weren't really sure how the semester was going to unfold. It was about three weeks into the semester. You all had some very interesting observations about what different instructors, different professors, were doing for you to help you kind of cope with the extraordinary situation of everything being moved online. And, in some cases, with your classes everything being moved online really quickly. Megan, if I can, I'd like to start with you and just ask how's it going? What's, what, what has changed over the course of the semester? What's still working well?

MEGAN: So not a whole lot has changed since the beginning. Some of my classes have switched from synchronous to asynchronous. As we wrap things up, teachers have still been really consistent with making sure they, like give out lots of reminders for assignments and exams, which has been really helpful, and helping the the semester go smoothly.

JIM: Great. Micah?

MICAH: Yeah, it's been a really great semester. Um, it's definitely, definitely been different. I would say that, yeah, I agree with Megan not much has changed, but I definitely, uh, you know, settled into a more stable routine since we last talked, and that was really helpful because at the beginning I was definitely feeling a little bit overwhelmed. I remember thinking, like, what am I going to say because I'm going crazy, um, but yeah, definitely it's gotten a lot, a lot easier, to, you know, communicate with teachers and go to Zoom and be on time and you know just get everything done that needs to be done.

JIM: Claire, how about you?

CLAIRE: I'm just the exact same as Micah and Megan. My professors have really, um, continue to you know, um, communicate really easily about, like you know, homework, assignments, and tests that we have due this coming week or next week, you know, and I'm just happy that open communication still has really helped me out. You know, achieve the grades that I've been wanting to, um, and just have a pretty overall, um like, smooth experience this fall semester.

JIM: So, Micah you just had mentioned that you, uh, you found ways to cope over the semester. So, so, can you give us an example of some of the things that you've done, uh, or how your routine developed over the course of the semester?

MICAH: Yeah, well, I've definitely found that I work better in certain times during the day. Personally, I like to get up and go, so my first class is at eight and I go to that. And I try to be really consistent even though I know eight o'clock sounds a little early, but it's, it's actually really helpful, because I get up at eight, I go to class, um, I might have a

class later on but, um, once I'm going, I really, really go until about two or three, and I know, that like, probably around 3:30 my brain is off. Um, so yeah, that's one way that I cope is to work within those certain hours. If I can, get in homework from like seven to nine. Sometimes that's great, but I'm just not a three a.m. person. Um, and that has been a great coping mechanism. I also just, um, have been working on making sure that I take breaks. Like, I just got back from a walk right before, uh, we're talking here. And that was really great to clear my mind. Um, other little things too, just like knowing, uh, when I need to eat and like maybe it's at 12, maybe it's a two, and just like keeping with, um, keeping with good schedules.

CLAIRE: Um, keeping a routine has been really helpful for me too. Um, I work two different jobs on campus, and so, being able to have my set work schedule that's consistent every week, and then being able to, um, adjust my homework time, um, my week is pretty consistent from, you know, getting up in the morning, going to the gym, getting a quick shower, and doing some homework, um, going to class, and then going to work and then coming home making dinner has been a pretty solid routine for me, recently.

MEGAN: I think something that's been helpful for me is that even when my classes have switched to asynchronous, I still set aside that same time of day that I would have class to work on that homework, and make sure that I'm still staying on top of things and staying consistent with my schoolwork so that I don't fall behind.

JIM: That's an interesting, that's an interesting take, and I, and, um, that's one I might pass along to some of my students. Actually, I think that there's sometimes a... The feeling that asynchronous means it's extra, and yeah, I think it's really successful that you can schedule that time to work on it. It just means you're not having that, that immediate connection, but you're still, it's, there's still work to do. Right? So, and I'll just open this up for anyone. What surprised you about this semester as it proceeded?

MEGAN: I think, personally for me, I was surprised at how quickly the professors are able to respond to our questions because I know that they have their own grading and other things that they need to be working on during the day, but I had sent out an email to a couple of my professors last weekend asking about projects and they respond within 24 hours. And usually professors, um, they sometimes say like "oh I won't be close to my computer over the weekend," but they have been very quick to responding which is very helpful in completing projects on time. And just being able to work on stuff whenever I need to get it done.

MICAH: I agree Megan the communication with professors has been awesome this semester and really, really helpful because I mean, yeah, sometimes even faster than 24 hours for me. But one thing that I noticed is that a lot of my classes that meet together I just feel like we have a really good bond. Something that we might not have gotten in, like, in-person learning because you know everybody just sits down does class and goes, but I feel like I really got to know people in my classes through, like, breakout rooms. And I wasn't expecting to meet people and to get to know them that well and to get to know professors that well in a classroom setting. Um, and that, that has been really, really cool to see happen.

CLAIRE: Uh, to follow up with Micah's point, um, I've had some different group projects in classes and just like...I'm just overall surprised on how well, like, we've been able to work together you know with different group chats and being able to meet on Zoom, you know once a week. I'm just surprised that we've been able to, you know, do that, you know, because think about it like a year ago that wouldn't have even been really an option.

JIM: No that's great to hear that, that, that's working out for you. Are you using any technologies or anything like that? Like I know Group Me has become very popular among students. Are you using that to help keep up with classes and stuff.

MICAH: Yes, for sure that's something that I use pretty much on the daily, um, I have I think two classes that have group chats. Megan and I are in the same class from one of them. And so, we're always like wait is this what we're supposed to do, so um, and then I also have that for some of my RSOs and extra curriculars that's been great for connecting with students. Even those who, you know, I'm living at home, but I'm still near campus. There are some people who are living two hours away from campus, and they're still able to be involved and yeah Group Me has been very, very helpful this semester.

CLAIRE: Not only with me, but we've also been using um Band. It's a website, but also an app that we can use I know that a couple of my different classes have been using it, but also like my business fraternity on campus has also been using it.

JIM: Great, that's great to hear, and for these Group Me groups, I guess they are, I'm not as familiar with Group Me as I probably need to be. Are these, have these been organized by your instructors, or are these things that just kind of naturally, organically came up among you students.

MEGAN: Now our students that will send out their numbers into like the Zoom group chat so somebody can compile them all into the Group Me, and so, it's something that we run on our own and take care of, so that way we can all stay connected with one another even when we are in person.

JIM: Oh, that sounds awesome. So, in terms of, you know, at this point in the semester, normally, we would be everyone would be kind of feeling the burden of those final projects being due. Final exams are coming up. How is that like for all of you this semester compared to last year, and are you doing anything in particular? Or are your professors doing anything in particular to prepare you for that?

CLAIRE: I would say the stress of finals and projects feels the exact same as last year, um, not much has changed. There's still the scary deadlines that you have to hit to get everything done on time, um but everybody has still been like really quick to respond and meet and work with you. And, like I know, one of my projects was a group project so we had to set up our own Zoom and figure that out. And sometimes, it actually does work better for me over Zoom because you can do it from virtually anywhere, and it's been nice to just be able to meet with them, um, at whatever time we have.

MICAH: Yeah I'd agree, um, it, yeah, it still is scary and I'm still like, "oh, my goodness I've got a bunch of tests,". Um, right? When we get back from our fall break, but I feel like I definitely have more time right now because you know I'm staying inside trying to stay safe, protect other people, and myself, and so, yeah, I'm like social life is not as much of a high priority so that gives me more time to focus on these projects, tests, all of that. Um so, I don't feel as just, as I usually do...Talk to me in a week and a half, and I'll be a complete, completely different person. But I do feel that like being virtual, you know, it takes out the time that you might be, you know, walking from class, class and I can get a lot done in 10 minutes. So, definitely, it's a little different but it is still very scary.

CLAIRE: Plus with the whole like online, um, experience I just feel as though I have a better idea of like when all my assignments are due, just because like you know when in person classes it was more your professor would be like, "oh by the way we have a test next Friday," like you know, but now with, you know, online you know that because it's already on, like, the last calendar. Because like in the past like my syllabus is for, um, in person teaching. Like, I feel like my professors would always be like, "hey we're changing this, real fast like, this due date is going to be different,". Both online courses, um, and, you know, professors being able to do recorded lectures, um, everything is stayed at a pretty consistent pace.

JIM: That's interesting. So, would it be fair to say that there are, there are things you've experienced that you would like to see professors continue to do once we get back into normal times. Whatever that's going to look like. Is that, is that fair to say?

CLAIRE: Yes, most definitely, I, um, I'm the type of gal that will plan out months and ahead, like, I've been planning out stuff I'm doing in January already, you know, or even for like next year with like apartments. Um, and so, just being able to get the idea in the very beginning of the semester when like you know this test is, or this big assignment is due, and stuff like that, just helps me plan out my stuff because you know I put that on my calendar and you know I'll adjust my work schedule to that, or I'll adjust like my workout times even, and just like different stuff like that. Just so I have enough time to get it all done.

MICAH: I definitely, um, I really appreciate the time that professors have taken to meet with me over Zooms. Um, I'm in a Spanish class and my professor, um, I reached out, and just said, "hey can we you know give me some tips on my writing," and, um, it was super nice. He met with me for like 45 minutes, and we you know tackled my paper, and just like looked at different things even the tiniest things he was really helpful, and he was super encouraging. I've had multiple Professors, um you know, if I stay and ask questions after class like, "Micah you're really doing a great job keep up the good work," and I mean last year as a freshman I didn't really have the need to go to as many office hours, personally, and so it's been nice to get that one-on-one time, and I, I think that something I would love to see kept up, is yeah, that one-on-one time that openness to being available and meeting with us in that encouragement. Because you know what, we're not seeing very many people and sometimes it's super easy like I'm alone doing my homework for, you know, a lot of hours every day, and I'm like, "oh". I

can, you can, get really down on yourself, so it is, um, very, very helpful to have that encouragement.

JIM: Megan did you have anything you wanted to add?

MEGAN: Yeah, just kind of like with what Micah said. It is very helpful to meet with professors. That's something I've tried to be more intentional about this semester, especially, since I won't be seeing them face to face. I still like to be able to make that connection with them, and Zoom has been a really helpful way in doing that.

JIM: That's great to hear and you know, we just, I just recorded an episode with a colleague in the School of Communication that, that should be on the feed now. And one of the last things we talked about was the fact that he opened up office hours on Zoom for the first time, because, of, he had to because of COVID. And found it to be a very, a very rewarding experience, and he actually required students to meet with him. I don't know if any of your professors actually do that, or not, but, um you know, regardless, I think my hope is personally, that as we get back into, again, whatever normal times look like, that this whole Zoom thing doesn't entirely go away, and especially for office hours, because I think it's just more convenient for everyone too. And it may be a little less intimidating. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it may be a little less intimidating for some people especially if they're really new to campus to meet with a professor. Kind of in the safety of a Zoom space as opposed to having to go into their scary office, and trip over all the books and all of that stuff. I had a question? I want to kind of turn our focus towards spring. It looks like spring is going to be very similar to fall in terms of how courses are delivered on our campus. Registration has been open for a few weeks now, one thing that I know that the departments on campus made an extra effort to do for spring registration was to list the modality or at least the best guess at what the modality of the course, every particular course, is going to be. So, did you notice that? and I'm just curious, and anyone can jump in. Did that factor into your decision about what course to take?

MEGAN: So, I did notice that whenever I signed up for classes, but I have like a very planned out schedule until I graduate since I'll be graduating a semester early, and I, regardless of whether it was going to be online or not those were the classes I was going to take, and that all of mine are listed as online, currently, which is kind of a bummer, but I understand that it is for the safety of all of us students and staff.

MICAH: Yeah, I agree, like I have a very planned out schedule too. I'm, you know, similar to Megan, I am going to graduate early, and that, that was sometimes difficult to be like, "oh this might be online or in person". It was interesting to like create my schedule. I like to draw it out and put you know put the blocks in for the times, um, but I have two labs, and I already, you know, assumed that they would be in person. And I'm, I'm fine with that, because I'm really excited about these two labs. But all of the rest of them are online. So yeah, I did notice it, but it really didn't factor, like too much, into my decision of classes, um, it's pretty much the same as usual.

CLAIRE: Mine's the same way this semester. Um, all my classes were actually asynchronous, so, none of them I, like, the exact same time. Other than one lecture that was kind of like,

um like, not optional. Like, I would always go to it just because it was at 9: 35, and I enjoy, like you know, getting up, and um going in the morning. But my professor recorded it for students, you know, that had to work in the morning, or had other commitments. But, um, next semester all of my classes will be synchronous. Um, it wasn't that much of, as you know, deciding factor when choosing my classes because, like you know, as the same with Micah and Megan, like my um, schedule I have, and like I've planned out with my college business advisor, um is very like strict like this semester. I'm taking these this summer, taking these, you know, and so it wasn't that much of a deciding factor. But um it has been able to help me, kind of like, adjust my schedule for next semester with, like you know, work, and um, just other, like, extracurricular activities that I have.

JIM: So, this might be an unfair question for you Claire, because you have, you've had mainly asynchronous classes, but, but for all of you, do you have a preference? Do you prefer having that synchronous experience or you know, are you able to make the best of an asynchronous experience and, and kind of work at your own pace? And, and get done what you need to get done.

MICAH: Personally, this semester, especially asynchronous, has been really beneficial to me just because, like my work schedule, I work during the morning and then the afternoon, and just having classes in the early morning right before I go to work has been helpful. Like those ones, I'm able to meet with what the rest are, all asynchronous. So, I can do that on my own time. Um next semester, I am looking forward, however, to the synchronous classes just because I'll have more of a connection with my professors, just because, like, I just don't feel as though I have that close of a connection with all of my professors. Just because some of them, like, really haven't had many office hours this semester, or um, I haven't really been able to see their faces because they don't record their face on Zoom. Which, um, is one thing that I would hope, like, even next semester, for like, asynchronous classes, like maybe, having their face in the corner of the Zoom when you watch it, just so that you kind of get that little extra person to person, even though you're not, you know, even with them or even at the same time um, having that class.

JIM: That's a great tip.

MEGAN: I would say that I definitely prefer synchronous if it is available. I really like interacting with my other classmates in the breakout rooms, and I like being able to ask my professors questions when they come up during the lecture. And so, if I had to choose, I would choose synchronous, but I realize there are some benefits from asynchronous like creating your own schedule. So, it's been nice to have a little mix of both.

MICAH: Yeah, I agree, I have half as synchronous and half as asynchronous. Um and I, I would say that for me the synchronous classes that I, you know, those I needed to be like on Zoom. I mean I'm in organic chemistry, and I really liked coming to class, and, you know, having my questions ready. Because, and that's a, for me, it's a little bit more of a difficult course, and I needed that like every day consistent like teacher time. Um and that has been really helpful. Something that I wanted to hit on that Claire said earlier, was her professor records the lectures and I have a professor that does that too, and

um that has been really, really helpful because I like to show up to class every day so I do and it's nice to have the option to not. You know, if I want to sleep in a little one day. But going back right before the test, that has been so helpful, sometimes I've re-watched every lecture for, like the three weeks that we've covered before the test because it's just great to have like a renewal of that information. So, teachers, hear me right now. Please! Record your lectures, if you can. Definitely, Definitely, helpful, helpful.

JIM: Well, that's great advice, I think. So, a final question. What are you looking forward to the most in the spring, or is there something that you're, you're going to be actively avoiding in the spring that maybe you experienced this fall? What, what, how is this fall shaped what you think or what you want to achieve in the next semester?

MEGAN: I definitely think that this fall has helped me become more comfortable with Zoom and just doing everything virtually. Whenever we switched to online last semester kind of haphazardly like, not really knowing what was going on. That was a much more stressful situation because we had no idea how to manage our time. We didn't understand like um, like, when some of the assignments would be due. It's just very confusing, and kind of just thrown together at the last minute because nobody had any idea that it was going to happen. But now that we have like an entire semester under our belt of, like, actually having, like, carefully planned out lessons, for on like, designed specifically for online has been extremely helpful, and I think that it gives me like a better, um like, hope, or perspective for what next semester will bring. Because I think that it'll be much more organized than what we experienced whenever it was just kind of thrown together at the last minute.

CLAIRE: I'm also just excited for, like, my classes next semester, um, uh, this semester I was finishing up most of my gen eds, and some of the more like um not basic business courses that everyone has to take but it like it's just the general studies ones. Um but next semester, I'm starting to take a lot more of my marketing courses so I'm super excited for that. Just because, you know, that is my major, and also, I'm actually excited for synchronous classes. Just because I'll be able to have more of a connection with my professors, you know, um, like, of course last spring, I had a really close connection because I was going to a bunch of office hours because I was in some difficult math classes. Um, and then also just seeing my professors you know like every day every other day whenever the course would meet um in the semester just with like the asynchronous courses I just haven't had as close to the connection, um, with them, and I'm a very big people, people person, and so not having that connection is kind of a little bit difficult. But next semester, I'm for sure really excited for that and then being able to put like a face to a name.

MEGAN: I think I'm most excited for, um, oh I'm excited about all my classes, but, um, for my major, I'm in a food science lab next semester, and I've been in the food lab before, and it's, it's really fun we all have our, our white lab coats and our hats and we all come in, and, um, it's kind of like a party. A really fun learning party, and I'm I'm really excited about that, but I'm also kind of excited about the fact that like this fall I've learned that I can really get a lot done each day, and I, I really like making my own schedule when I can, even though sometimes it's like oh I can just skip this because it's

me making myself do this. But yeah, I'm excited for the amount that I can get done next semester, and yeah, mold my own schedule to what fits best for me. JIM: I'm going to say right now I think really fun learning party is my new favorite phrase. I like that, I like the idea that you have fun even, even with what we've been kind of going through in the weirdness of 2020. That uh, you can still look forward to having fun in the experience of learning. So, Claire, Micah, Megan, thank you so much for joining us again.

MEGAN, MICAH,CLAIRE: Thank you, thank you for having us.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. find out more about our podcast and the programming offered through the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology go to CTLT.illinoisstate.edu. For Megan, Micah, Claire, for all my colleagues at CTLT until we talk again, happy teaching.