

Remote Student Engagement
Graduate and Professional Students
Fall 2020

Developed by Molly Constantine, Kristin McAuliffe, Ivonne Dufresne, and David Cotter
Graduate Affairs, Office of the Provost

Assistance from Alyssa Kariofyllis, Office of Distance Education

--

Keeping students engaged – both academically and socially - has always been a key aspect to ensuring a positive graduate and professional student experience. As a large majority of our graduate and professional students learn remotely this fall, it's important to develop new ways to keep students connected to the Boston University community. Below please find some pointers for remote student engagement. Some of the information might not be groundbreaking, but we hope it allows for an opportunity to think about how your school or college is keeping its remote students engaged this semester. *A positive student experience is a key aspect of not only current student retention, but also future student recruitment.* How we support our students now will impact how we recruit and enroll students for the coming cycles. We hope this serves as a jumping off point for discussion in your school or college.

Identifying Remote Students

The LfA indicator is available for faculty on their course rosters. *School and college staff should use the LfA indicator reports (on the COVID-19 Teams site)* and share that data with advisors by providing lists of their advisees who are remote this semester. Staff should pay special attention to new students who are remote to ensure that they are being checked in on by BU.

Communicating with Remote Students

We encourage you (i.e. staff, advisors, etc.) to *individually call/Zoom each remote student* in your unit at least once during the fall semester. This interaction will go a long way in making them feel more a part of the BU Community.

When emailing, be conscious of language to make sure it's *inclusive* of both on-campus and remote students. *Develop separate messaging* when appropriate.

Announcements and updates

- Staff and faculty should *send short emails with important reminders frequently*. Since students aren't going to be checking in on campus in the same ways, departments should identify ways to communicate important information and deadlines virtually without overwhelming students.
- This may seem obvious, but it's important to remind students that faculty and staff are available to help even if they can't meet in person. *Make sure students know how to schedule virtual appointments with faculty and staff.*

Personalized emails

- *Check in with your students* and ask them how they are doing outside of their course(s). Students will really appreciate this personal touch from faculty and staff.

Postal mail

- *Send mail to your remote students.* Yes, it can be expensive, especially if mailing overseas, but it shows your commitment to them and their success.
- Consider sending *stress balls during exam periods, BU swag before a virtual event* (so everyone can show up wearing it), or other helpful information that would be best received in person.

Academic Engagement

Note: When hosting events via Zoom, *be conscious of attendee time zones.* Whenever possible, *record events.*

Engagement with faculty

- Organize *faculty-led panels* so that faculty members can share more about themselves and their work in a casual setting.
- All faculty should hold *virtual office hours* throughout the semester. Again, please be conscious of student time zones.

Special interest discussions in Zoom

- Host discussions in Zoom, *separate from coursework*, to allow students to engage in a facilitated conversation.
- You should also offer sessions on *accessing helpful resources* as a remote student. You can re-use content from orientation and use it as a “refresher” opportunity.

Career development

- The Center for Career Development (CCD) is offering all workshops (and most all services) virtually this semester. *Check out the event calendar [here](#) and advertise with your students as you see fit.* Please note that all workshops are available to both graduate and undergraduate students, except for those that have “Graduate Students” in the title, which were created exclusively for graduate students.
- Communicate all of the online career resources available to graduate and professional students, including *CareerShift, Handshake, the VMock Smart Resume Platform.* More information can be found on the Graduate Education [website](#).
- Organize virtual conversations with *alumni and faculty.*
- Organize networking opportunities, especially if you have *alumni in the areas* where your remote students are located.
- Offer individualized *resume/cover letter assistance.*

Educational Resource Center (ERC)

- All ERC workshops will be virtual this semester, including their [Master’s and Professional Student Workshop Series](#). This is a great way for students to connect outside of the classroom and develop skills for a successful graduate school experience. (Note: These workshops will be recorded and made available on the Graduate Education Website.)

- Except for the Master's and Professional Student Workshop Series, all ERC workshops are available to *all students* (both undergraduate and graduate). Their events calendar is available [here](#).

BU Libraries

- The BU Libraries are *available and accessible to all students*.
- Consider partnering with BU Libraries for *virtual events*.
- Learn how the BU Libraries [has transformed to accommodate](#) Learn from Anywhere.

Community/Social Engagement

Note: When hosting events via Zoom, *be conscious of attendee time zones*. Whenever possible, *record events*.

Organize student-led panels about tips for learning remotely/balancing life

- *Ask returning students to lead panels* about how they adjusted to remote learning during the spring semester, and what tips they have for remote learning.

Student matching

- *Pair new students with your returning students*. Returning students can serve as informal points of contact for questions.

Student groups

- Student groups and associations should *host meetings online and invite new students*. We keep a list of many [graduate student groups and associations](#) on the Graduate Education website. If there are any groups in your school/college that you do not see listed here, please contact Molly Constantine at mfconst@bu.edu and she will add it.

Connecting remote students

- *Do you have remote students living in the same area?* Find out where your students are learning remotely and connect them with their peers. You can also connect students from across different BU schools and colleges.

Encourage small group discussions in Zoom

- All students have fully licensed Zoom accounts. Remind students that they can schedule their own Zoom meetings to connect with their classmates and peers, form a study group, or socialize and network with others.
- Make sure students have *access to each other's BU emails*, as appropriate.

Organize Zoom *pub nights or trivia* to try to recreate a social event

- Include both *remote and on-campus students*.
- Be mindful of *student time zones*.

Facilitate hobby classes (painting, crocheting, knitting, book club, etc.)

- These can be a place for people with similar hobbies to *share ideas and techniques* and learn from each other.
- Please be *mindful of students' access* to resources and supplies.

Resources

Be sure to remind students that even though they may be learning remotely, *they still have access to plenty of resources at BU* – many of which have been adapted to accommodate remote students and are available virtually. Please encourage students to explore the [Resource Finder tool](#) on the Graduate Education Website. The Resource Finder also pulls in events relevant to the search.

Remote learning tips

- The Office of Distance Education crafted a collection of [learning tips for remote students](#). This can continue to be a resource for students throughout the semester.

Virtual resources for wellbeing

- The BU Wellbeing Project created a *list of [wellness resources](#)* that graduate and professional students can access online.

Ombuds

- Remember that all students have access to the [Office of the Ombuds](#).

Accessibility

Newsletters and fliers should be accessible

- *Newsletters or fliers that you email should be accessible*. Screen readers are not always able to read PDFs; images are not accessible without alternative text.

Be mindful of how you host webinars/virtual events

- Webinar hosts should keep in mind that *students may need accommodations*. It is best to ask during sign-up if an attendee requires an accommodation.
- You should *read aloud* any questions asked in the group chat.
- *Describe* any PowerPoint slides and shared visuals.
- Consult with [Disability & Access Services](#) about *captions and interpreters*.

Students may request accommodations online through the [Disability & Access Services website](#).