


ONLINE LEARNING REPORT

COVID-19 PULSE SURVEY



Online Learning Findings for Higher Education

COVID-19 has disrupted higher education by forcing institutions to move face-to-face classrooms into an online environment. According to research experts and universities, this disruption is here to stay.

Institutions, educators, and students are facing uncertainty as they try to both quickly adapt to teaching online and understand best practices. Many institutions and educators are innovating, and students are developing opinions on what does and doesn't work based on their experiences. Our goal is to gather and share these insights in an effort to support and improve business management education.



Methodology

From May 20 to 26, 2020, we surveyed over 800 business students and educators to better understand the state of online learning in higher education. These students and educators accessed the survey either by email invitation or notification on the hbsp.harvard.edu website.

Who We Surveyed

TEACHING POSITION*

Professor	23%
Adjunct Professor	21%
Associate Professor	20%
Assistant Professor	16%
Lecturer	15%
Other Faculty	3%
Administrator	1%

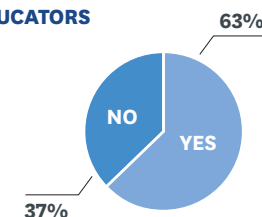
LOCATION

	<i>Educators</i>	<i>Students</i>
United States	70%	59%
Europe	9%	15%
LATAM	6%	7%
South Asia	5%	7%
Canada	4%	7%
SEA/NZ	2%	2%
Middle East	2%	1%
Africa	1%	<1%
Japan/South Korea	1%	<1%

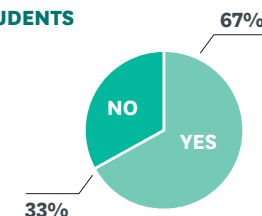
*97% of educator respondents identified as teaching business courses.

PRE-COVID-19 ONLINE TEACHING/ LEARNING EXPERIENCE

EDUCATORS



STUDENTS



KEY FINDINGS IN ONLINE LEARNING

Key Findings Summary

1 While the majority of students and educators think that online learning is less effective than in-person learning, they also acknowledge that there is an upside to online learning.

- > Educators find it easier to monitor participation, engage reticent students, and provide more touch points for both communication and learning assurance.
- > Students appreciate the opportunity to personalize their learning experience by engaging with content on their own time and revisiting previous content as needed.

2 Educators are innovating on teaching methods.

- > The majority of educators rank the case method as the most effective teaching method in an online learning environment. They feel there are new ways to teach online, including leveraging online tools and “micro-engagements” to drive student engagement.

3 Students find video to be the most effective medium when learning online.

- > While students didn’t vary much on what learning materials they find effective, video was rated the highest. Educators are using student-produced video to flip the classroom. Students are utilizing supplemental video to expand their understanding.

4 Students miss the community feel of being on campus.

- > Students miss being on campus and being able to network with peers and their professors.

5 Students want to learn about both the global impact of COVID-19 and how to better manage themselves.

- > Faced with studying independently at home, students want to learn how to better manage both their time and stress. They also acknowledge that COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on the world and want to better understand the ongoing ramifications of the virus.

Finding 1

While the majority of students and educators think that online learning is less effective than in-person learning, they also acknowledge that there is an upside to online learning.

- Students and educators think that online learning is less effective than in-person learning, citing lack of student engagement, difficulty gauging student learning, and distractions in the home environment. But some believe it can be more effective with the opportunities to personalize learning and can more easily measure engagement and comprehension.
- Students can learn at their own pace and on their own schedule. It also enables them to easily revisit material as needed.

Educators and students were asked how effective online learning is compared to in-person learning:

EDUCATOR RESPONSE:

“With online learning, students can **personalize their learning** and not feel pressured by time constraints. **Students can go back** if they have difficulty understanding a concept.”



STUDENT RESPONSE:

“This method is certainly different, but I actually enjoyed being able to replay pre-recorded videos, take notes, and **digest the material at my pace**—especially for more complicated topics—and the mixture of teaching methodologies, pedagogy, was much more effective for me.”



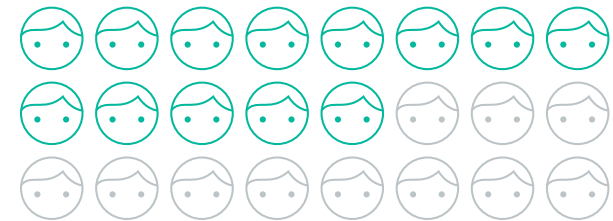
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Finding 1: Effectiveness of Online Learning

- It is easier to monitor participation and engagement online. Every discussion post, poll response, and assignment submission is logged by the learning management system. Educators don't need to rely on memory to determine who said or did what.
- Shy or reticent students have more opportunities to contribute to the discussion. Students that do not speak English as their first language have more time to understand course content and process their responses.
- There are more points of engagement between both students and educators. In discussion boards, students have the opportunity to develop their written communication skills. The ability to incorporate different types of activities allows students with different learning styles and skills to do well.
- Students feel less pressure to memorize content and greater freedom to think critically about the information available to them.

59%

of educators feel that online learning is less effective or much less effective than in-person learning.



64%

of students feel that online learning is less effective or much less effective than in-person learning.

Finding 2

Educators are innovating on teaching methods.

- When asked to indicate the effectiveness of teaching methods, the majority of educators rank the case-based method as the most effective teaching method in an online learning environment and are adapting to incorporate online tools as part of the learning process.
- Mixing teaching methods—including group discussions, polls, and video presentations—helps keep students engaged.
- Educators are using online tools—including mind maps, interactive whiteboards, and visualizers—to advance student understanding of concepts and bolster group work.



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Finding 2: Innovating on Teaching Methods

- Incorporating frequent “micro-engagements” or a variety of touchpoints/check-ins such as polls, discussion boards, chat, breakout group activities, and quizzes works well for skills assessment and student engagement.
- The increased data around student engagement and learning online gives educators the ability to quantify progress and comprehension and adapt their teaching style and methods as needed.

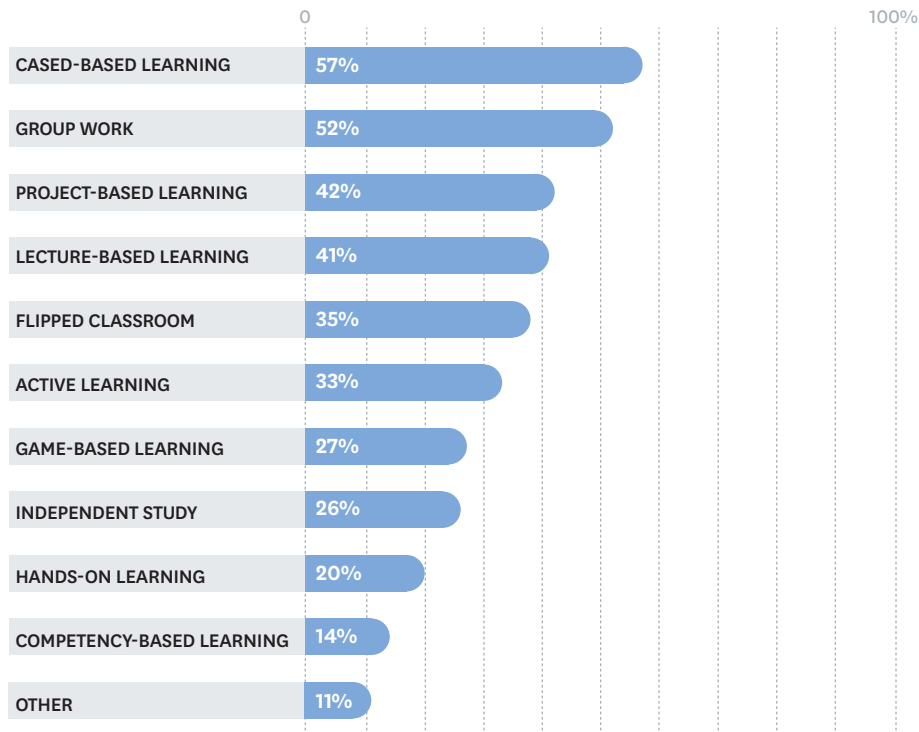


Educators are using online tools—including **mind maps, interactive whiteboards, and visualizers**—to advance student understanding of concepts and bolster group work.

Finding 2: Innovating on Teaching Methods

FIGURE 1

Educators Rate the Effectiveness of Online Teaching Methods



SURVEY QUESTION: What teaching methods did you find to be the most effective with students in an online environment?

Source: Harvard Business Publishing research study conducted in spring 2020. N=488



Tip: Regardless of your preferred teaching method, you need a balanced approach to your online classroom. Read [The Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Balancing Act](#) for best practices for leveraging asynchronous learning to conduct better synchronous sessions.

Finding 3

Students find video to be the most effective medium when learning online.

- While students didn't vary much on what learning materials they find effective, video was rated the highest. They value recorded material for the ability to re-watch the content if needed.
- Educators are finding innovative ways to use videos. Rather than presenting during synchronous time, for example, they are having students record video presentations and having the class view those presentations asynchronously.
- Students are interested in non-traditional, video-based learning materials to supplement their understanding of course topics.
- Students like self-paced work and rated self-paced tutorials and online courses higher than educators did. But they want some sort of structure, accountability, and/or proof they are learning.

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Finding 3: Video and Online Learning

76% of student respondents use **YouTube** as an online learning resource.

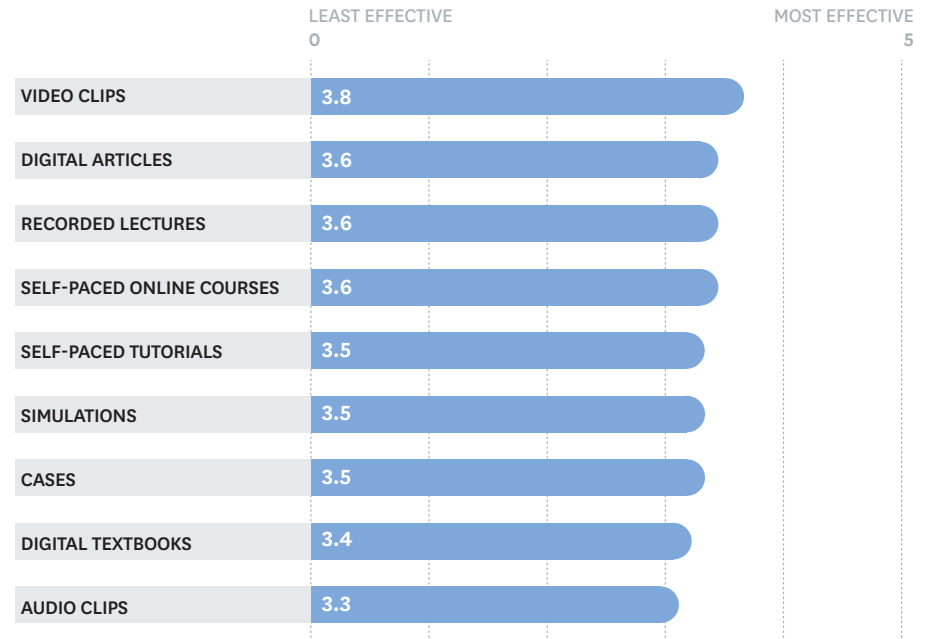


67% of student respondents who used **video** reported them as extremely effective or very effective.

59% of student respondents who used **recorded lectures** reported them as extremely effective or very effective.

FIGURE 2

Students Rate the Effectiveness of Online Learning Materials



SURVEY QUESTION: Keeping in mind courses that you've taken online, please rate the effectiveness of the following course materials.

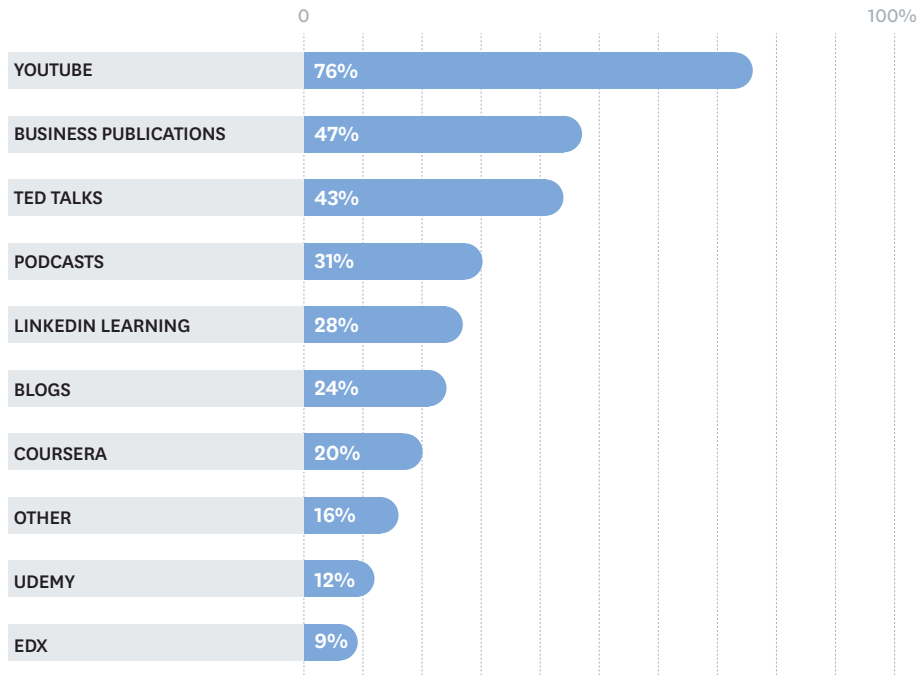
Source: Harvard Business Publishing research study conducted in spring 2020. N=488

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Finding 3: Video and Online Learning

FIGURE 3

Other Learning Resources Used by Students



SURVEY QUESTION: Outside of materials assigned for class, what other learning resources have you used recently?
(Select all that apply)

Source: Harvard Business Publishing research study conducted in spring 2020. N=488



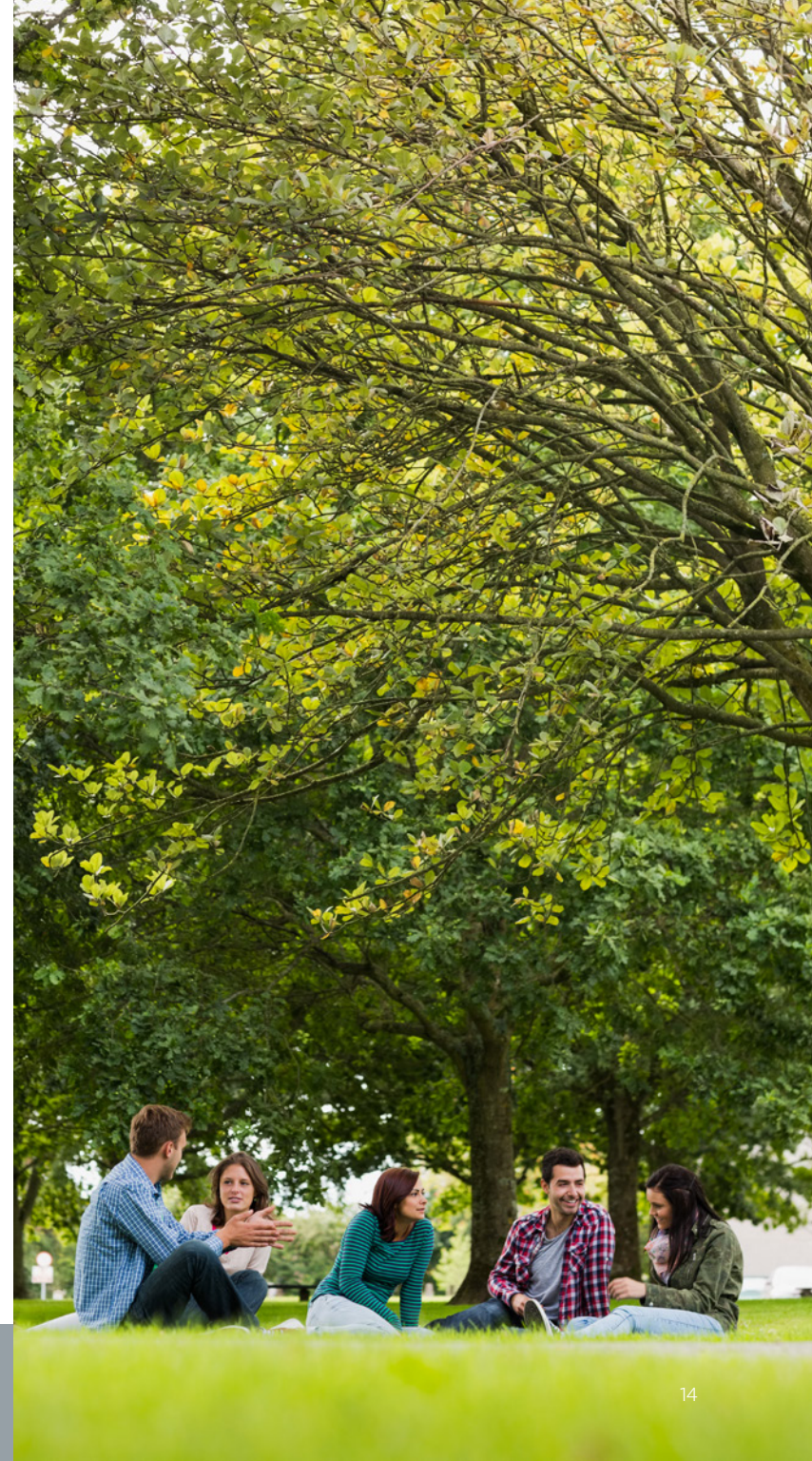
Tip: Access these [free videos](#) we have found to be effective in the online classroom. Also, these cases come with [video supplements](#) that dive further into key learning objectives.



Finding 4

Students miss the community feel of being on campus.

- Students miss being on campus and being able to network with peers and their professors.
- Online discussions and interactions are often highly structured. Students miss the organic, personable conversations and interactions that happen in person.
- Educators found some innovative ways to overcome this, including hosting virtual office hours, welcoming feedback, and using breakout groups.
- Educators have also turned the remote learning experience into a learning opportunity for understanding and managing working remotely or with remote coworkers.



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Finding 4: Campus Community



57%

of student respondents are concerned about the **quality** of online learning.



11%

of students are most concerned about their **access to technology** during the upcoming semester.

“Because I had students all over the world, I had office hours at several different times of the day/week. **I had more interesting conversations during office hours at 10 p.m. on Friday nights**—both about course material and about the **students’ school experiences and personal goals**—than I have had before.”



Finding 5

Students want to learn about both the global impact of COVID-19 and how to better manage themselves.

- Students have expressed interest in learning about topics that relate to current world events.
- While less than 30% of educators said that they were interested in incorporating content related to the impact of COVID-19 into their next course, students ranked it as one of the topics they were most interested in learning about next semester.
- Students want to learn how to manage their time better to become both better students and, ultimately, better workers. With the widespread impact of COVID-19, they also want tools to manage stress.
- Other topics that have come to the forefront for students as a result of COVID-19 include crisis management, leadership, and business ethics.

Students want to learn how to manage their time better to **become both better students and, ultimately, better workers.**

Finding 5: Learning about COVID-19



50%

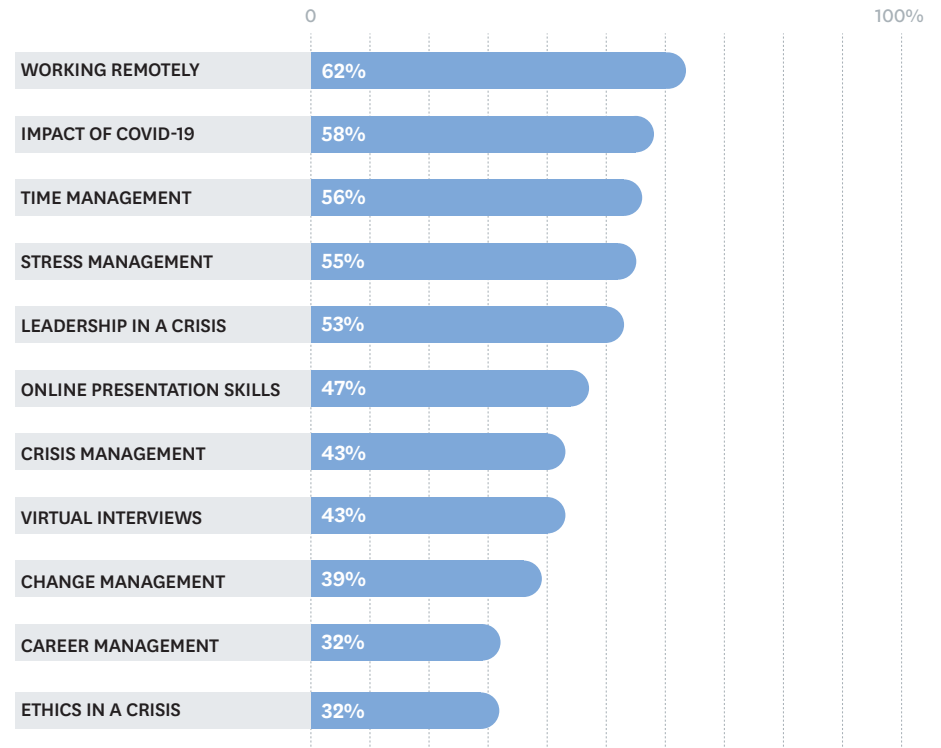
of educators indicate COVID-19 is something they are “**not at all interested**” in addressing in class.

58%

of students rank COVID-19 as something they find **important to learn** about in class.

FIGURE 4

Students Rate Their Interest in Learning Topics



SURVEY QUESTION: In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, which of the following topics have emerged as important for you to learn about? (Select all that apply)

Source: Harvard Business Publishing research study conducted in spring 2020. N=488

COVID-19 has physically separated us and created a future of sometimes daunting uncertainty. The results of this survey have confirmed that educators are not alone in their thoughts, feelings, and actions as we continue to search for the best next steps and the new normal. Harvard Business Publishing Education invites you to continue the conversation with us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#). You can also subscribe to our weekly e-newsletter, [The Faculty Lounge](#), to get insights, tips, and the latest updates on the ever-evolving world of higher education.

→ SEE ALL OUR RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ONLINE
hbsp.harvard.edu/teaching-online-resources





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Additional Resources

Finding 1: While the majority of students and educators think that online learning is less effective than in-person learning, they also acknowledge that there is an upside to online learning.

- › [Energize Your Online Course with Group Work](#)

Finding 2: Educators are innovating on teaching methods.

- › [8 Cooperative Learning Practices to Enrich Your Online or Hybrid Classroom](#)
- › [Yes, Business Simulations Can—and Should—Be Taught Online](#)

Finding 3: Students find video to be the most effective medium when learning online.

- › [18 Business Videos You're Free to Use in Class](#)
- › [Case studies with video supplements](#)
- › [You Can Still Engage Your Students When Teaching Online—Here's How](#)

Finding 4: Students miss the community feel of being on campus.

- › [Online Learning Can Still Be Social](#)
- › [In Hybrid Classes, Some Students Are Likely to Feel Left Out](#)

Finding 5: Students want to learn about both the global impact of COVID-19 and how to better manage themselves.

- › [Connecting COVID-19 to Coursework](#)
- › [Should We Talk About COVID-19 in All Business Courses?](#)
- › [Teaching Crisis Management in the COVID-19 Era](#)

Other Online Learning Resources:

- › [5 Steps to Stay Focused When Teaching Online](#)
- › [8 Tips for Teaching Online](#)
- › [Bringing the Case Method Online](#)
- › [How to Get People \(Students\) to Actually Participate in Virtual Meetings \(Classes\)](#)
- › [How Higher Ed Students Are Navigating Through Uncertainty](#)
- › [Mastering Case Teaching in Online Classes](#)
- › [Online Teaching Survival Guide: A 7-Part Audio Series](#)
- › [What I Wish I Knew Before Teaching My First Online Class](#)
- › [What's Different When You Teach with Simulations Online?](#)
- › [You Shouldn't Be the Only One Talking in Your Digital Classroom](#)