

Why A Face-to-Face Campus Culture Benefits From Internal Web Meetings

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Higher ed is an industry built on relationships. This is no more so than on a traditional residential campus.

Much of the work of moving projects and initiatives forward happens in conversation. There is a reason that a shared joke across higher ed is that nobody can get any work done during the day - as everybody is too busy in meetings.

On most campuses, these conversations are face-to-face. They involve going to each other's offices, finding a meeting room, and sometimes grabbing a coffee. (My preferred one-on-one meeting venue is a walking meeting).

A face-to-face meeting culture accomplishes many important goals. There is a ritual to the face-to-face discussion, one that involves norms of social connections. Meetings are places to do work - but they are also places to learn about and make connections with our colleagues.

The recommendation that I'd like to make to anyone working at an institution with a strong face-to-face meeting culture is to make room for experimentation with campus web meetings.

Here I am talking about doing a meeting where everyone participates from their offices (or from home or wherever they may be). To have a web meeting you will need some web meeting software. On my campus we use [Adobe Connect](#), [Blue Jeans](#), [Google Hangouts](#), and [Skype for Business](#).

I've seen a big uptake in [Zoom](#) - which seems like an elegant and powerful platform. You might have [WebEx](#), [GoToMeeting](#), or [Collaborate](#). *What am I missing?*

There are many benefits to transitioning some of your existing campus face-to-face conversations to a web meeting.

Here are 5:

1 - Capacity Building (Online Education):

We use the same platforms for web meetings as we use for web teaching. Getting comfortable with a web conversation with a colleague will make it easier to teach a synchronous class online.

You don't need to teach a purely online course to want to have an online class. Are there ever times when you are too ill to come to campus? Or your kid is sick? Maybe you have a conference to attend? Our web meeting platforms will enable you to hold class from wherever you are. You might even find that you like teaching a synchronous online class now and again.

2 - Efficiency:

The beauty of web meetings are that they have low overhead. No need to travel across campus. No need to find a room to meet. We spend lots of time and energy in the movement to and from our face-to-face meetings. Web meetings are efficient in that they can be squeezed in without the buffers for travel time.

Web meetings are also efficient because the social norms of web meetings are different. In a web meeting there is less chit-chat. There is something about the online meeting format where everyone gets right down to work. Ideally,

the agenda is available for everyone to see - and one person is facilitating the meeting. Often, a web meeting can be more easily actively managed than a face-to-face discussion.

3 - Inclusiveness:

How often do we struggle to find a time to meet. We send Doodle polls. We look for free/busy on calendars. Discussions that should happen get held off.

Since web meetings are more efficient, they can also be shorter. You can get as much done in a tightly facilitated 30 minute web meeting as you can get done in a 1-hour face-to-face discussion. Participants are also more likely to agree to a web meeting if they know that they don't need to travel from place to place.

4 - Transcending Hierarchy:

Meetings reify hierarchy. The participants with the most status and the most power tend to dominate the discussion. They talk the most. Participants in the meeting tend to perform for their bosses. We nod our heads when the boss speaks, make connecting and affirming non-verbal gestures, and generally act like the hierarchy loving apes that we are.

All of these hierarchy reinforcing behaviors are lessened in a web meeting. There is no head of the table in an online meeting. Everyone is digitally equal, and a skilled web-meeting facilitator can ensure that everybody is heard.

5 - Resilience:

Our higher ed work does not stop when we can't be on campus. Our work follows us home when we are ill or recovering. We might be attending a professional conference, but most everyone is back on campus - and decisions need to be made.

Developing a comfort with web meetings when you don't need to will serve you well when you do. You will find that you or one of your colleagues can't be on campus for a critical meeting. If you want that meeting to be any good, then you should avoid putting the distant person at a disadvantage by connecting them by phone. Have everyone in the meeting log on from their own computers (or tablets or phones).

The quality of the meeting does not need to depend on everyone sharing a single physical space.

Have you been experimenting with internal web meetings on your campus?