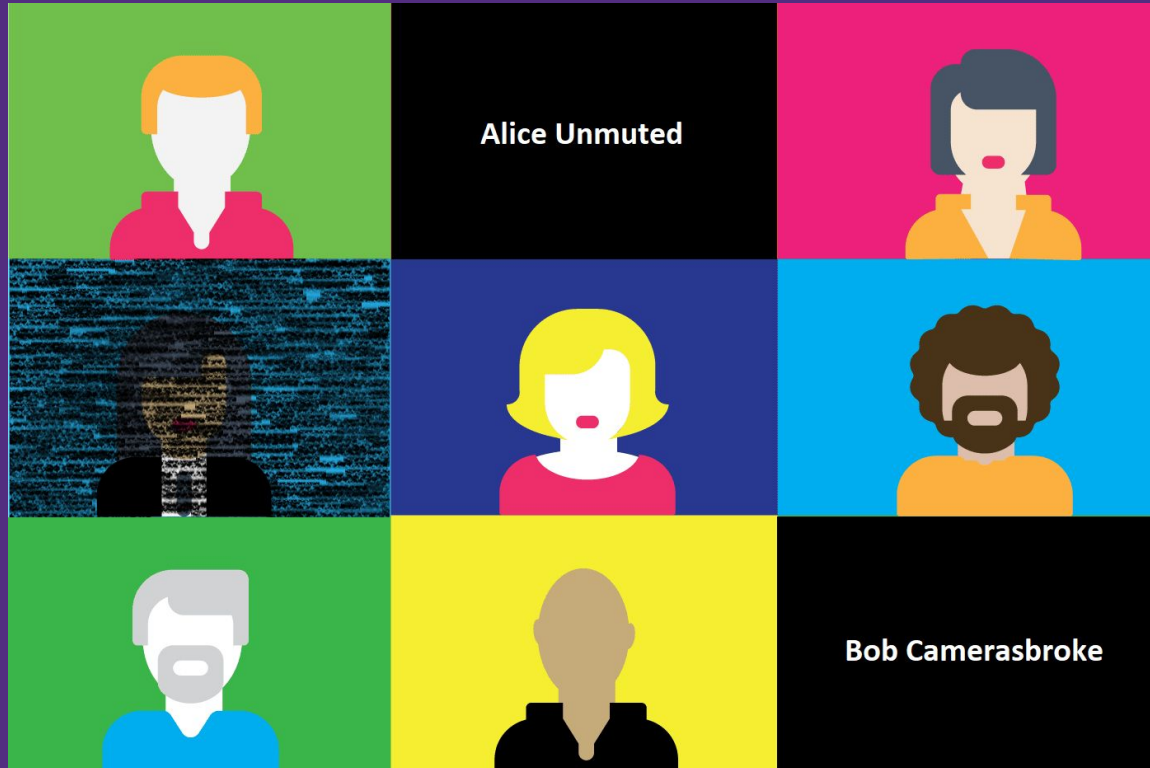


Both Sides of the Story: Changing the “Pre-existing Culture of Dread” Surrounding Student Teamwork in Breakout Rooms

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Do you remember this?



Toward Remote Work and Teaching

- **Growth in online classes offered since 2020 - estimated 84% of students have had an experience with an online course**
- **Sometimes difficult to transition a face to face class into an online format**



Our Research Questions

- 1. How do instructors prepare for and execute breakout rooms?**
- 2. How does instructors preparation and involvement impact student teamwork in breakout rooms?**
- 3. How do breakout room impact student collaboration and attitudes in online learning?**

What we are building on? What are contributing to?

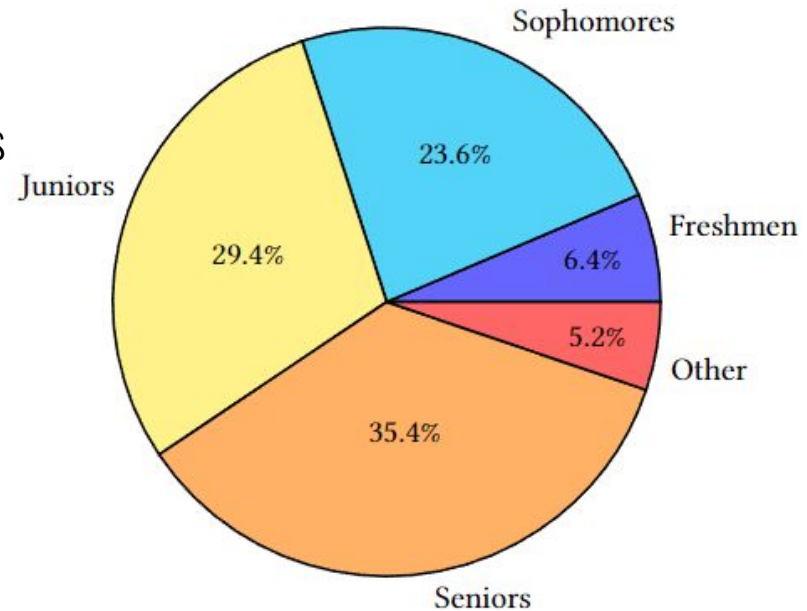
- **Building knowledge around distributed teamwork through work in higher education**
- **Building on understanding how students work together and collaborate in breakout rooms**
- **Highlight the importance of instructor involvement**
- **Exploring perceptions and reflections of instructors who have taught a virtual class**
- **Outline successes and failures of breakout room usage**
- **Propose design recommendations for online collaboration software**

Study Design

- **Two parts - pilot study on Clemson University's campus and a follow up open to all college attending individuals**
- **A two in one survey - one for instructors, one for students**
 - Open- and closed-ended questions
 - Optional interview sign-up at the end
- **729 total survey respondents**
 - 173 instructors
 - 556 students
- **28 interviews**
 - 13 instructors
 - 15 students

Participants

- **Instructors average age 37 years and instructing for 9.32 years**
 - 58% female, 33% male, 4% non-binary, 2% transmasculine, 3% undisclosed
 - The majority (41) of instructors had 1-5 years of teaching experience
- **Students average age 21 years**
 - 48% male, 45% female, 4% non-binary, 1% transmasc/agender, 1% undisclosed

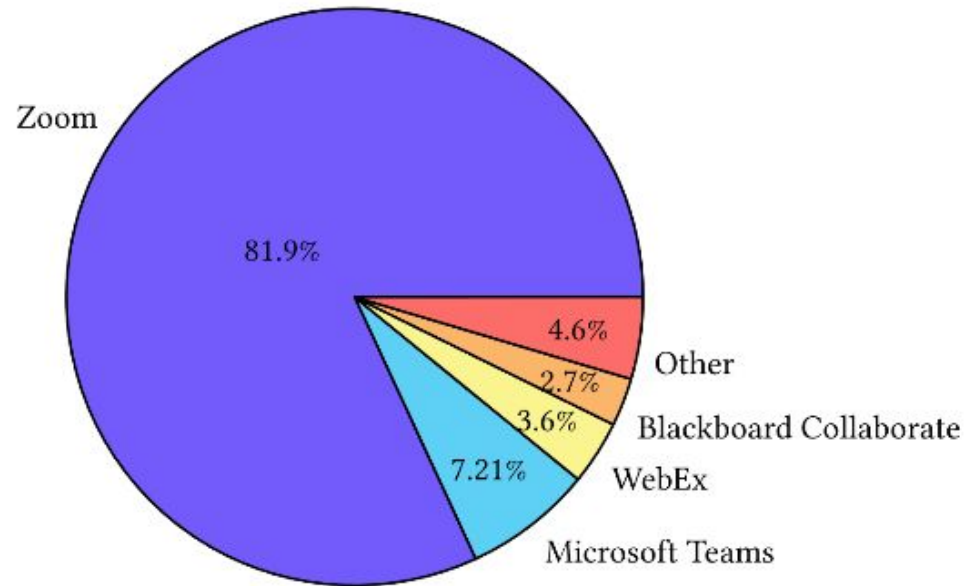


Analysis

- Quantitative survey questions -- standard statistical methods
- Interview questions were only qualitative data -- team coded interviews from the pilot study
 - Used these codes to team-code the second round of interviews

help dislike
assignment submission
engagement
task division group assignment
social loafing collaboration
instruction team work

Results



Themes Found - Survey & Interview

#	RQ	Theme
1	RQ1	Levels of Pedagogy
2	RQ2	Student Success VS Instructor Involvement
3	RQ3	Instructor Perceptions of Breakout Rooms
4	RQ3	Student Perceptions of Breakout Rooms

Levels of Pedagogy

Instructor Interviews

1. **No research or prep work done**
 - a. Most-commonly found in our instructor interviews
2. **High-level of understanding surrounding teaching online**
 - a. University-provided training/materials
 - b. Social media
 - c. Peers/other instructors
3. **Formal research done about how to conduct online courses**
 - a. Beta-testing strategies over Spring Break 2020
 - b. Multi-year experience teaching online courses

“So yes, I would love to do [online classroom research]. No, I don’t have the time.”

“I have explained to my students that [this] University is not an online university. ... So [this class] is not set up in the best way to be an online class.”

Student Success VS. Instructor Involvement

Instructor Perceptions

- **Most instructors set clear expectations for their breakout room sessions**
 - Instructors found students to be cameras-on and unmuted during check-ins
- **Many instructors used collaboration tools to monitor students' progress**
 - Google Suite was popular
- **However, instructors still find that students are working independently**

“Yes, when I jumped through breakout rooms, the majority of them have cameras on and are unmuted and are on task.”

“Because they’re in a zoom breakout room, you’ve got to visit those rooms much like you would if you had breakout groups in a lecture hall...”

Student Success VS. Instructor Involvement

Student Perceptions

- **Students felt classes needed to be reorganized to fit in the virtual space**
 - Mirroring in-person formats can lead to negative student perceptions of online courses
- **Students wanted clear expectations for breakout rooms**
 - Unknown expectations led students to work independently
- **Students wanted routine check-ins from their instructors**

“Instructors don’t know how to play to the strengths of breakout rooms. ... [They] try to mirror in-person instruction as closely as possible...”

Perceptions of Breakout Rooms

Instructor Perceptions

- **Mixed perceptions**
 - Depended on course content and student types
- **Less content-heavy courses may be more suited to breakout rooms**
 - Content heavy courses may run into time limitations
- **Student types factor into breakout room success**
 - Less mature or motivated students lead to less collaborative breakout sessions

“I would prefer more student interaction. But I don’t really think that’s really due to the breakout room, that’s due to a lot of student personalities.”

“Because they’re in a zoom breakout room, you’ve got to visit those rooms much like you would if you had breakout groups in a lecture hall...”

Perceptions of Breakout Rooms

Student Perceptions

- Overall receptive to the use of breakout rooms
- Negative perceptions come from:
 - Instructor negativity and inexperience
 - Other students' behaviors/attitudes
 - Distractions

“I think the most engaged I ever was in a breakout room... It’s when you’re the leader, so you have to participate.”

“Online courses are good, they’re not inherently bad. I just really wish professors would stop treating them as inherently bad.”

How do we improve the online learning experience?

Justify Breakout Sessions

- **Students appreciated breakout rooms for socialization and teamwork**
- **However, students felt some breakout sessions were unnecessary or forced**
 - Too long or short
 - Assignments too vague
- **We recommend:**
 - Ensuring breakout rooms are necessary for the assignment/task
 - Providing students with clear, detailed instructions
 - Ensuring the time needed in the breakout room is justified for the assignment

Monitor Participation

- **With current collaborative software, instructors had concerns about monitoring student participation**
 - No high-level overview of student progress available
- **Checking-in on breakout rooms only gives insight in that room while the instructor is present**
- **We recommend:**
 - Providing students with a shared document to collaborate on
 - Informing students that their participation will be monitored via the document
 - Conducting check-ins while breakout rooms are in session

Provide Persistent Instructions

- **Accessibility to instructions or activity**
 - Conveys expectations
 - Clear communication

- **Use a collaborative software**
 - Able to monitor the groups working (our second recommendation)
 - Easily accessible by all students

- **Alleviates social loafing, encourages participation**

Research Online Teaching Strategies & Tips

- **Students know when instructors put little effort into their class**
- **Read your own class, listen to students, take feedback**
- **Learn the “ins and outs” of the technology you plan to use for virtual learning, utilize all features that you can**

Thank you!

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