



The Accounting Podcast Series

S02E04: Noel Boys, Warren

McKeown, Joana Liong, Demi Wang

Transcript

A: Albie Brooks

N: Noel Boys

W: Warren McKeown

J: Joana Liong

D: Demi Wang

A: Welcome to TAPS, The Accounting Podcast Series. I'm Albie Brooks, and working with me is Abbey Treloar. Today we have a guest panel, comprising four academics from the Department of Accounting here at Melbourne. They coordinate and teach into some of our larger accounting subjects. Our area of interest in this episode is the experience of online teaching and learning thrust upon the education sector by COVID-19.

Noel Boys joined the University in 2002 as a Teaching Fellow and has been active in curriculum design, coordinated and taught into numerous subjects, as well as being the recipient of numerous teaching awards. He is currently coordinator of the core accounting subject in the BCom, Accounting Reports and Analysis, or ARA, as we like to call it.

Working closely with Noel in ARA is our second guest, Joana Liong, who joined the Department full time in 2002. Joana has performed a key role in the management and execution of our first-year accounting subjects.

Warren McKeown joined the Department in 2008 as a Teaching Fellow, has taught numerous subjects, and currently coordinates the second accounting subject in the accounting major, Introductory Financial Accounting, or IFA1, as we call it. Warren has enjoyed 40 years of experience teaching in accounting and finance subjects.

Working closely with Warren in IFA1 is our fourth guest, Demi Wang. Demi, who joined the Department full time in 2018, specialises in innovative curriculum design across the accounting program. To each of you, a big welcome to TAPS.

So much to talk to you about. What a year. Large impacts on the education landscape. I'd like to start with you, Noel and Warren, and ask you to briefly outline the subject that you coordinate and how it was delivered pre-COVID, let's say in 2019. Noel?

N: Thanks, Albie. ARA and the introductory accounting subjects, as well as being the first subject of our accounting major, is also a core subject in the BCom. Our enrolments are around 2500 students across the two semesters in the year. The subject focuses on accounting as an information system. Unlike a traditional first-year accounting subject that introduces debits and credits, ARA focuses on the information needs of users, both internal and external.

This subject introduces the nature, style and content of a general purpose financial report, and the tools that can be used to analyse this information to assist external user decision-making. We also consider the internal use perspective, looking at management accounting tools such as budgeting and CVP analysis. And we look at the issue of sustainability and consider its impact on how businesses operate and how information about sustainability practices is captured and reported to meet the information needs of stakeholders.

Like many first-year subjects, ARA is delivered via three contact hours each week, a two-hour lecture during which new content is introduced, and then a one-hour tutorial with each class comprising around 18-20 students participating in group discussions and case studies that apply the previous week's lecture content.

A: Thanks, Noel. And Warren, what about in IFA1?

W: IFA1, this is the follow-on subject from ARA. And a number of students do drop off because it's no longer a subject which some people continue on with. So we have generally around about 600-800 students per year, and that's spread over two semesters. It basically focuses on the accounting process or the transaction recording from the beginning and tracing through the transactions right through to the financial statements, which is a follow-on from what the students will have learned in ARA.

Included in that will be an introduction to a couple of the accounting standards, so that leads on to – gives them an introduction to what the accounting rules are all about for when they go into IFA2. Traditionally, we've had a two-hour lecture, face-to-face lecture, and then tutorials with about 17 students in each one, a one-hour tutorial each week, where students would be required to come and get marks – or they would have got marks for attendance and participation. So they would be in groups of about 17-20 students in a tutorial room. So that's really what we've been used to over a long period of time, and now we've changed.

A: Of course. Look, I think the delivery modes here with the large lectures and the smaller tutorials, particularly in the early-stage accounting subjects, is pretty common across the industry for the way in which accounting is delivered. Now, for some years, the university and educators more broadly have sought some movement towards online teaching. Do either of you recall being enthusiastic about this pre-2020? Noel?

N: I was certainly aware of the push towards blended learning, and I accepted that there were parts of my course that could be delivered online in an asynchronous mode, and that there were inefficiencies, perhaps, in delivering the same lecture four times a week. But my preference remains strongly with the live performance, I guess due in no small part to my lack of familiarity and confidence in using the technology associated with online learning.

But I also justified it on the basis that, depending on whose research you believe, somewhere between 66 and 92 per cent of communication is through body language and, in my opinion, you lose that in an online context. But I guess also I got the sense that it was – you know, students were happy with live lectures, and I based that on attendance patterns that generally held up during the semester, and based it on that rather than any formal polling that I did of students.

A: Of course. Warren, your enthusiasm for online pre-2020?

W: My prior experience in online learning was going back a few years ago with Open Universities Australia where we delivered courses in hard copy. And the contact with students was effectively confined to telephone calls. I do remember calling – having a phone conversation with a person in the navy in Japan who was doing a subject, and another one in a prison who was doing a subject as well. So that's a little bit of history there.

But my enthusiasm for online learning – I thought, well, it really reflects what Noel was saying about the human dimension of actually being face-to-face. And in a lecture theatre you can actually respond to questions which might be put to you during a lecture rather than through the pre-recorded lecture where you don't have that opportunity to follow up a particular on-the-spot question. So in terms of enthusiasm, certainly it saves the time of repeating lectures, so it has an advantage in that respect, but it loses something in the context of doing a recorded lecture.

- A: Thanks. And I think also that pre-2020 when people talked about online learning and teaching, many of us interpreted that to mean different things, and so the whole idea of what online learning and teaching was different depending on who you talked to and the degree to which the online components unfolded. So I think that's kind of interesting as well. Now, Joana and Demi, if I could ask each of you whether you have had any experiences, again pre-2020 – had you had any experiences with online teaching, learning, curriculum development. Perhaps yourself first, Joana?
- J: No, I had not had any experience with online teaching prior to 2020, Albie, so that was really new water that I'm treading on.
- A: Do you recall having any sort of particular attitude towards online teaching or learning?
- J: I was definitely a little bit scared about it, just with what Noel mentioned before, the technology that I had to get used to and I had to learn, and also I believe that it would be a different experience in delivering the subjects to the students.
- A: Of course. And Demi?
- D: Well, for me, I think yes and no. And I think it really goes back to, Albie, your comment about what online teaching means, because I think even before 2020 we've all had at least a certain component of the subject online, like we give our students learning materials on LMS, which is an online component. And also, our primary channel of communication with students is through emails, which is also online. So if you count that as online teaching, then yes, I've been doing that even before 2020. But the answer is also no, because if you are talking about the actual delivery of lectures and tutorials, I've never done that online through Zoom like we did in 2020.
- A: Okay, thank you. So, speaking of Zoom, let's fast forward into 2020. COVID-19 hits, the world changes completely. In our own small space, we find all our teaching goes online. We soon find out what that means, of course. So welcome to the world of Zoom, as you mentioned, Demi. Semester 1 was an experiment, in many ways, for all of us. After about three or four weeks of face-to-face, we found ourselves in this Zoom-based online world. So I'd like to focus a little bit more on semester 2 where we got to apply some of our experimental results, if you like, from semester 1. So to you, Noel and Warren, initially, how is your subject now restructured in this online space in terms of delivery? Noel?
- N: Well, firstly, the lectures were entirely online and asynchronous. So lectures would be published and made available on the Friday of each week with students obviously able to review them whenever it suited them. The only expectation was that they would review the lecture before the following week's tutorial. So it gave the students a fair bit of flexibility. The tutorials were delivered with the Zoom conferencing. The classes sizes, which we initially intended to be around 60-80, ended up blowing out to between 90 to 100 or more due to some sudden and unexpected increases in our enrolments. The structure of a class: students would communicate through the chat function and through the polling tools.
- We would ask students to keep their microphones muted and gave the option of whether they wanted to show their faces on the camera. Fair to say that most opted to remain with their cameras off. A key component, though, of the delivery that was a significant difference to the way that we delivered classes in the past was that each class had two academics assigned to it. One who would do the main delivery, and that was a role that Joana and I, who worked together, we rotated that. So one of us would do the main delivery of the content and the tutorial, while the other would assist with the behind-the-scenes stuff, I guess like being a producer, if you like, things like triggering all the polls and all the technological stuff, technological support, as well as addressing specific questions that students might post to the chat tool, which was really good because students could ask their questions and have them addressed by the secondary academic without disrupting the flow of the class. I found that worked really well.
- A: Excellent. And Warren, similar?
- W: I think I just echo what Noel said almost exactly. The change I made was that I was able to use the first semester's recordings and review those and only make some changes where I felt necessary for particular

slides. And that was released on the start of the week so that the students had a whole week and a half, I think, before they had a regular tutorial to look at. So effectively that was a follow-on exactly from what ARA did in their presentation. But we only had about 68 in tutorials at the maximum, but similar comments about the way students participated. One of the things that was different here is that we had to take away the mark which we would have given for attendance and participation. And that led to a little bit of a drop-off, sometimes a bigger drop-off, in terms of participation and attendance.

- A: I think that's possibly something that's been common across many of the subjects. I take it, however, that in both cases there was a recording of one of the tutorials?
- N: In our case, we did an independent asynchronous recording, so we had one of our tutors who would do an in-studio version. I guess it kind of replicated a lecture-style. So rather than offer a recording of one of the specific tutorials, we went with that option.
- W: In IFA1 we didn't record one. We gave the students the option to work out their own times able to fit in to at least attend one if they wanted to.
- A: Okay. Just rolling on from there, then – this is a question to each of you, really, and we'll start with you, Demi, perhaps – what surprised you about this setting that you are now in which both Noel and Warren have outlined for each of the subjects? So what surprised you about teaching online, and then, linked to that, what surprised you about the online learning experience for students?
- D: I think what strikes me the most is that having everything online doesn't necessarily mean that there will be a lack of human interaction, because initially I went into online teaching with the mental image of everyone staring at their computers, laptops, with me doing all the talking and – because it's very easy to just lurk in the background when you have 50 or more than 50 people in the same lecture classroom. So I find actually in reality there can be a lot of interactions and engagement happening within even a virtual classroom when you use the right technology and even just features of Zoom. And in terms of experience for students, I think it depends, because I think with everything being online, we are putting more onus back on to students because even on our side we're trying to make the classroom engaging, encouraging, and interesting, but what kind of experience different students will have to a large extent depends on how involved they want to be and how well they are taking responsibility for their own learning.
- A: That's actually a really good point. We can provide all sorts of things, but in the end I guess it's how the student interacts with those things.
- D: Yes, exactly.
- A: Joana?
- J: For me, I find that online teaching is more challenging. Having no physical access to students and with limited availability to use and observe facial expressions and body language, it's harder to generate students' participation or interaction and to gauge how much they understand. I'm surprised at the number of students choosing not to turn on their cameras despite efforts encouraging them to do so. I would have thought that the sense of isolation or loneliness or demotivation that may be created by online learning, especially during COVID-19 lockdown, would have encouraged them to interact more, starting with showing their faces.
- In a face-to-face environment, all students would be present and be able to see each other in a tutorial room, whether they were engaging, taking down notes, discussing, asking or answering questions. This privilege I think gives students that sense of learning the community spirit, that they are not alone, that they are all there to do well so that they could inspire or motivate each other. So I believe that students turning on cameras would enhance their online learning experience as they would be more focused or less distracted when they know their tutors or peers can see them, and in turn increasing their class engagement and maximising their performance in the subject.
- A: Okay, good. Warren?

W: Albie, there's one point I'd like to make, and that is to commend both Joana and Demi with their enthusiasm and how they tried to engage students. They would invent a theme for each week, whether it be bring along a pet or a dog or your favourite football team or something. And so they'd try to encourage a little bit of week-by-week what's going on today sort of thing to see what other people are doing, as well as providing the chats and monitoring that so efficiently and providing the poll questions. So there was certainly a big effort being made by Joana and Demi in trying to engage students to create their interest.

N: Absolutely.

A: Good point. Noel, did you want to add anything to what surprised you?

N: Yeah, a couple of things. And certainly from what I gather from talking to other people, they're not unique to my experience. The first thing that surprised me was that the two-hour lecture took me two days to prepare it, record it, upload it, and publish it. The other thing specific to the lectures is that what was previously taking me two hours to say in a lecture theatre face-to-face would only take up about 90 minutes of a recording. And I think that links back to or perhaps confirms an earlier point I made, that I think one of the things you lose is that body language communication. That evidence suggests that there's 30 minutes of lost time that may well have been that body language communication that previously a lecturer would use to gauge whether students are connecting with what you've delivered or whether you need to re-explain something or whatever.

In terms of the tutorials, the student participation I don't think has necessarily increased, but what Joana and I found was that students seem far more likely to respond to, say, a poll question while they're protected by the online anonymity that they would be less inclined to do if you were in a classroom and asked for a show of hands to a question. They were also more inclined to offer unsolicited answers to questions via the chat that they might be too shy to maybe do, conscious of their voice or conscious of speaking in front of other students. So we tended to get better responses, I feel. But also they appreciated the opportunity to ask questions using that same chat function without drawing attention to themselves necessarily, as might happen in a class. They might be conscious of, "I hope this isn't a stupid question." I've felt the volume of questions we got online was probably far greater than you would typically get in a live class. So they were a few things that surprised me in a good way.

A: Yep. Anything else to add, Warren? Did you have anything else to add or are you happy with that?

W: No, I'm happy with that.

A: So let's turn our attention, then, from there to assessment. So without getting too deep into the whole assessment processes, but of course this then led to our assessment to be conducted online as well. Any comments about the conduct of assessment online? From my own perspective, I thought being able to conduct the assessments online – I thought this was – I wouldn't have thought this would be the case, but even down to sort of final semester exams, having them done online I think has been a real revelation for me, for a whole combination of reasons. I think it sort of really worked quite well. But how about yourselves? Any thoughts about assessment? Something that's worked really well because of online, or something that you think is missing completely?

N: I'm happy to go first here.

A: You go first, yeah.

N: In ARA, our continuous assessment is largely automated anyway, so going online didn't really impact us that significantly. What did change for us was one of our assignments was a group assignment, and we switched that to being an individual assignment. And that was largely driven by my concern about how we would get students to form groups given they hadn't had the chance to get to know each other in a classroom environment. I was also concerned about how we'd monitor the group activities online without that regular contact with the students. But that said, I'm interested in hearing from other subjects about their experience with online group work. I'm certainly prepared to review that and maybe re-institute the group assignment in 2021. The single biggest change, obviously, was in relation to the final exam.

The structure of our exam was entirely different, driven largely by my concern about academic integrity. So our exam was administered using the assignment tool on Canvas, and we relied very heavily on drawing questions randomly from question pools, and using randomly generated numeric questions on the exam. But in terms of student performance, I'd say we probably saw a bit of a longer tail than we previously did. I thought the spread of results by and large was not dissimilar to previous semesters, but we probably had a slightly longer tail. Whether that was due to the change in the style of assessment or whether that was a result of an impact of the COVID-imposed isolation on students, I guess that's the unknown question.

A: Yep. On assessment, Demi, did you have anything to add?

D: I think one change after moving online is we've taken out the assessment on tutorial participation and attendance. I think it's quite a challenge to determine how you assess – well, attendance is easy, but how do you assess participation in an online environment? I think we've always had the discussion around whether not saying anything equals not participating.

A: Yes.

D: So that's the same case with online teaching, because a lot of people, they might be listening, they might be following what you're saying, engaged in a silent way, but it's very hard to tell if you still want to assess participation through Zoom.

A: I think one of the things that I've learnt through this online experience is the notion of what actually participation is, and I now look at it a whole lot more broadly than I did previously and, you know, what the notion of being engaged in a class is, as you referred to, Demi, that it is actually quite a broad perspective, particularly when it comes to assessing participation we – in most of our subjects and courses, we have low percentages attached to the participation score as opposed to some courses and institutions around the world where it might be much higher. And so for a relatively small proportion, I mean I had the same thing in a subject that I was involved in where the participation score was removed and added to the assignment, for example, for that reason. There are ways, obviously, that we can try and track the participation, but what is participation and what is engagement for a student in a class? And that's one thing I've learnt through 2020, is this much broader perspective of what that might mean. Any thoughts, Joana, or Warren?

N: If I could jump in, though, one of the things that Joana and I found quite amusing is that when you would get to the end of a tutorial and you'd say, "Okay, see you later everybody," all the numbers would drop off but you'd always end up with two or three students who still had their camera running. And you say, you know, "So-and-so, are you there? Are you there?" And we did kind of wonder whether there were some students who might log on, go off and make a cup of coffee and never come back.

A: That is true.

N: So that is one aspect, I think, of if we were to rely solely on the fact that a student is logged in to say, well, they've therefore attended, that potentially doesn't always prove that they were necessarily engaged.

A: That's true.

W: And that's the thing we miss with lectures, too, the people who've stayed behind to clarify a point. Coming back on the assessment in IFA1, without the attendance and participation mark, we substituted those with some online Wiley quizzes so that all of our internal assessment except for 5% was automated. And to put in place an element of writing an answer, we put in a five-mark or a 5% mark allocated to a writing exercise based on a previous type exam question, because it's been noted and reported on at examiners' meetings how generally poor students are in writing an answer to a question. So we tried to put in place a little bit of exercise on that with a little bit of feedback provided by the tutors.

When we came to the end-of-year exam, though, this is where I ran into a bit of a problem this particular time, and that's because of the technical matter of the number of students who had to log on to an exam at 3 o'clock in the afternoon coinciding with ARA and another exam as well. So we received numerous emails saying, "Can't log in: access denied," which caused a little bit of frustration for some students in terms of the anxiety in getting into the exam. And then part of our structure of the exam was to download a document

which contained questions they had to deal with, and then to do some work offline with that and then to upload an answer. So again we were bombarded with a number of people who couldn't access the download, the document to download, and then later on at the end of the results, the exam, we came across a few people who uploaded the wrong document, that uploaded the download document, which had no answer on it. So we've got to chase up a couple of people now to say, "Look, you've uploaded the wrong document," and they're on holidays. Anyway, so, look, a technical issue in terms of the online exam has been a bit of a frustration.

A: Sure. You might have created a new term there, Warren, "uploading your download". There's no doubt that –

W: It's natural.

N: Download your upload.

A: Download your upload. We will get better, hopefully, on this technical side. I must say, though, around the world, really, given the – it's not just us that moved online. The whole education sector moved online around the world. And for the most part, it's kind of done a pretty good job at being able to deal with that. Certainly at a local institutional level there's been some technical matters, but it's certainly been a huge change in that respect. Speaking of change, and speaking specifically with respects to accounting education, do you think 2020 and online teaching has impacted accounting education for the better? For example, in terms of curriculum development, innovations in teaching practice, and so on? Are we better off from an accounting education perspective having gone through this? What are your thoughts? Let's start with you, Noel, perhaps.

N: It's definitely different, but I think it's hard to say whether it's necessarily better. Some things were, others weren't. But I also suspect that what we might say as instructors and educators – what we might say worked well and what didn't might not necessarily reconcile with what the students think about what went well and what didn't. So I'd be really keen to get student feedback on these elements, but I think it forced us into changing the way that we deliver things, or the need to adapt to the way we were delivering things is probably going to result in some improvements in the way we go forward, if and when we return to the on-campus experience, which is perhaps pre-empting the next question, so I'll hold off.

A: But I think that's a good – I mean, if it's the case that because of the experience of 2020 when we do return to something more on campus than what we have in 2020, that what we're able to deliver and provide students is better, then I think that's probably a good thing. Warren?

W: I think we could learn something from this. I can, anyway. And what I'm thinking about this question is that these students are basically the first year students coming from secondary school. moving into tertiary education. And when I think about some of the students who might have enrolled, they could have had absolutely no face-to-face contact at all. They would have tuned in to listen to the lecture, they might have tuned in to listen to the tutorial, but they had no physical reaction to or comment and so on. So one of my beliefs is that for students to actually learn they've got to be engaged in it.

And I think sometimes missing out on this tutorial where they are actually face-to-face, where you can actually ask a student face-to-face to answer a question, at least they're confronted with providing an answer in that particular circumstance, whereas they're not so much in that mode when they are just simply at the end of a computer with a blank screen where you can't see them and they make no contribution. So I think this possibly is an indication – I've been thinking about this, about why the quality of the answers in the exam paper was, I thought, a little bit poorer than in previous semesters. And I think it's possibly because they don't seem to have an immediate follow-on, necessarily, of listening to the lecture and the tutorial in a lot of cases where they've actually engaged in dealing with some of the issues to the extent which we would have done in a face-to-face tutorial. So I think they're missing a little bit of an element there in the actual processing of the material which we provide to them.

A: Good.

- N: Just on that point, I wonder, too, whether the online assessment of a final exam is effectively an open-book exam. And I think another explanation for the drop in our results, especially at the tail end, would be that there are too many students who did not adapt very well to that. They over-relied on their ability to spend time looking at their notes, and I think actually ended up probably having to rush the last few questions because they ran out of time. They were so busy spending that valuable time there rather than relying on what they knew. But I think also, therefore, an element of the quality of questions is that because they could rely on the open-book environment that they tended to recite from their lecture notes rather than offer an individualised response. So that might explain it, too.
- W: Well, my approach to the exam this time was because they had open book, the idea was to try and structure the questions in a way which were more analytical and actually producing something they might have had directly from their lecture notes. So in a sense, I might have put the question in a reverse way where they would have had to think about it a lot more. And again, we found a lot of people who didn't get down to the last two or three questions.
- A: I think the writing of questions along those lines was probably reasonably common, that the more problem-solving type task was certainly more focused on for many of us. Demi or Joana, have you got comments on whether accounting education going forward will be better off for this experience? Perhaps Demi?
- D: I don't have any answer to that. I echo what Noel said. I think we were forced to think about alternative things for online teaching, but whether it's definitely going to make it better, I think it remains to be seen. But at least we're trying new things, and I think that's the prerequisite for a good change to happen.
- A: Okay. Right, look, a couple to finish off with. So given all of this, where do you think we'll see innovation in our teaching or in our curriculum design going forward? Do you think the experience of 2020 gives us any insight into where the innovations – assuming we need them, you know, but we all have to continue to move forward, of course. We talk a lot about innovation and technology in education, and some of that occurs in accounting education specifically. Is there anything where you think that opportunities exist for people to engage in development of materials, for example, relating to accounting education? So where is this innovation going to be? Do you think it might be in our content? Is it going to be in the way in which we deliver it? Is it the tools that we need to help us with online delivery? Or do you think all of those things already exist in sufficient quantities?
- W: I think a lot of the material is already there, but I wouldn't have made as much use of them as I possibly could do. For instance, a little short story or little short clips from experts, industry people, professional people on particular topics where they might only speak for four or five minutes. I wouldn't have probably done that in the normal lecture theatre, but now with this it might be possible to provide greater use of that. So it's been there, it's just I haven't used it before because of, perhaps, different settings and so on, but I think it's something which is a possible, if I become more skilled with the technical knowledge.
- A: Of course. Well, that might be where the innovation has to come from, right, tools to help us?
- N: I'll certainly be looking at ways in which I can take the best bits from what I learnt online into the face-to-face environment. I would offer using polls which, to me, is very innovative, but I accept that there are probably people listening to this thinking, "I've been using polls for years now." But the power of the poll that I discovered I thought was fantastic. It's a way to increase participation; kids are far more inclined to contribute to a poll response than they might be having to physically put up their hand to a question. But also it's value in using it as a diagnostic tool to test students' understanding of a concept. And I know this is not going to be particularly ground-breaking for those experienced in using polls, but I found that something that I'll definitely take into future classes.
- W: I think if we're moving on to – sorry, Noel. If we're moving on to 90-minute tutorials instead of the one hour, I can see a greater use of that during tutorials.
- N: Well, that's a nice segue into what I'd also see as an innovation. We're certainly looking to change the balance. Initially I said we had two hours of lectures, one hour of tutorials, we're looking to change that balance to be 90 minutes for both lectures and tutorials now.

- A: Yeah.
- N: And I'd probably also accept that in terms of the future I've probably delivered my last face-to-face lecture at Melbourne Uni.
- A: As disappointing as that is for you, I know.
- N: Yes, well –
- A: And I'm sure for students who don't know what they're missing.
- N: Maybe.
- A: Okay. So just one or two things to finish off. We've – as has the rest of the world – used Zoom as our product – or it could be Microsoft Teams or other such technologies, but for us it's been Zoom that we've used mostly. You mentioned the polls, which is something that's worked really well in Zoom. Many of us have used breakout rooms, for example, that have worked really well at times inside our classes. But if you were to suggest an improvement to the designers of Zoom, is there anything on your mind that you would think, "I wish I could..." whatever? Finish the sentence. Is there anything that you think, "Oh, it's unfortunate that I can't do this in Zoom"?
- N: Edit recordings nice and easily.
- A: Okay, yes.
- N: I would love the capacity or the scope to edit recordings in a far more user-friendly way than what currently exists. That would be one of them.
- A: Okay. Demi, did you have one? Joana? Is there anything you think, "Oh, I wish I could..."
- W: Turn their cameras on.
- A: Well, look, that is a – I must admit, there are times when, even though you might have 50 or 60 students in your classes, you do feel like sometimes you're talking to yourself. But once you get – I think in the early days in semester 1 that was something that you really had to get used to for students who – and I think many of the students like the idea of not having to turn their cameras on, or having the choice of turning them on or not turning them on. But, you know, there are other subjects and other settings where the students are encouraged not to use their cameras, to turn all the audio off, and consume, you know, or engage in whatever the tasks might be.
- N: Just on cameras, I'd love – I wonder whether part of the reason students are reluctant to turn cameras on is they might not mind me seeing their face, but they might be reluctant to have their face on full display to the whole class.
- A: Yes.
- N: And I wonder whether, as a tool, a functionality within the Zoom, that the student has the option to make their face available to the instructor only without necessarily being available to the whole class. Because in a class you might – only the back of your head's being seen by everyone in the back row, whereas the minute you click your camera on on Zoom, the whole world is seeing you. And I accept that there are some students that might be a bit shy and therefore would like to exercise the option of remaining anonymous to the class, but I think the instructor – we really lose a lot by not seeing the faces of the students.
- A: Yeah, actually, that's a really good point. So that is a solid, valid suggestion that, if enabled, would certainly maybe encourage more students to use their cameras.
- D: If I can just add to that. With cameras I'm always debating between whether I should make students turn on their cameras, but when I think about it – because we use slides when we teach tutorials, and when you go into a full screen of slides, you can only see – I don't know – three to four people even if they turn on their

camera. And I don't think anyone's going to scroll over the pages and see the other ones on the following pages. So what's really the benefit of having to ask them to have cameras on?

- A: Yeah, that's a good point, that once you share a screen then, yeah, all of the faces are lost, if you like, at any rate.
- D: Yeah.
- N: So maybe have the faces as a separate panel independent of whether you're sharing screens as well. So just like you can sort of pop out the chat function, maybe if you could pop out the faces, because I think another issue with the faces, too, is that when you go to record, all the faces – well, I haven't figured out a way of ensuring that the faces aren't appearing on the recording of the audio as well, or the Powerpoint slides you may be delivering. So to be able to pop them out as a separate panel I think would be really useful.
- A: That's also a good idea. All right, well, is there something – anything else based on our discussion this afternoon that you would like to add or something you've been wanting to say but not had an opportunity that relates to this sort of online experience? It does look like, you know, 2021 is going to be – well, it could be fully online, it could be partly online, it could be some kind of hybrid construction. A lot of unknowns still exist around this. And I think it'll be really neat going forward that whatever unfolds 2021, 2022 that the experience of the online – we're now certainly much more informed about the online teaching and learning experience. And I think it's fairly likely to impact our teaching, whether that's online, hybrid, or in face-to-face teaching. Anybody like to make a final comment, contribution?
- W: The only thing I've found – something that I'd like to mention is that during the tutorials we tried to get some students to become more engaged and we even broke them into rooms of two students so that at least they could get to know some other student in their group, because with this system they don't get to see other people unless they're prepared to turn their cameras on and engage with some people. And I think that's another element which is missing in the bigger subjects, that they don't get peer-to-peer discussion very often unless they actually know someone. And I think that's an element of the engagement which is missing with all of this, too.
- A: It's something for us to bear in mind. All right. Well, a hearty thank you to the four of you for being part of TAPS. We really do appreciate your joining us for this podcast, your contributions in online teaching and learning, and we wish you well with your teaching experiences going forward. So finally, thanks for joining us here at TAPS.
- N: Thanks, Albie.
- J: Thank you.
- D: Thank you.
- W: Thanks, Al.