Refreshing After the Quick Online Pivot

By: Dr. Martha Diede, director, Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence

Take time to breathe. Let your students take some breathing time, too. Congratulate yourselves on work well done to this point. You and your students have shown amazing flexibility, stamina and strength so far. That's an impressive feat!

You and your students might be experiencing some feelings of isolation as you adjust to the reality of staying at home. One simple way to create connection is to hide "Easter eggs," or hidden messages or media, in your course content.

Try typing "breathing exercise" into the Google search page. Reward yourself with the breathing exercise that appears. That exercise is an example of an Easter egg.

Any tool you use in your course offers the opportunity to hide an Easter egg to add a little bit of fun and foster a sense of inclusion.

For example, typing "anagram" into the Google search box will produce "Did you mean 'nag a ram'?" This feature works in other languages, as well.

In another example, during Pride Month (June), Google hides a rainbow-colored egg in its search results. Letting students know that you've hidden such an egg gives them an additional reason to engage with you and your course content.

To hide an Easter egg, simply put a short, encouraging message relevant to your course in a random place in your upcoming course materials. If you've developed any kind of inside joke in your course, reference that. Some faculty use this as a way to encourage engagement with the course texts or modules, putting one at the beginning of the week in a folder labeled "Easter Egg." Others are a little trickier, hiding theirs in the text of an assignment or adding a cartoon to a slide deck. Students who find the egg can send a message to the instructor for an extra point. You can even add an egg to a video lecture or PowerPoint if you plan ahead. You also could encourage students to hide eggs in their work that they submit to you. If you decide to try hiding an Easter egg, be sure to include alt-text for visuals.

Another way to encourage connection is to show your workspace at home. If you are interrupted by your new "co-workers" (people or pets), introduce them to the students. Ask your students to do the same. In large classes, select small groups of students to introduce their co-workers when you meet for a synchronous session. If you're primarily working asynchronously, create a forum so that students can introduce their spaces and/or co-workers. This technique can help to remind students that everyone is adjusting to working in environments that differ from what they imagined at the beginning of the semester.