

Mount Holyoke Develops Teachers' Careers Through Innovative Zoom Meetings



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Leadership Program at
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Challenge

Education budget cuts meant fewer teachers could visit Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts to receive training in teaching mathematics.

Solution

Host hybrid classes, where in-person teacher-students are joined by their colleagues from around the world via Zoom.

Result

A seamless learning experience for local, national, and international teachers that didn't break their districts' budgets.

Teachers aren't born knowing how to teach (contrary to popular belief). One can easily learn about a subject, but not everyone is necessarily able to teach it. This is why teachers participate in ongoing professional development and enroll in graduate programs to further develop their skills and careers.

Year after year, teachers traveled to schools like Mount Holyoke College to further develop and refine their teaching methods in mathematics. This went on for a long time until districts started losing their funding due to the recession. As financial resources grew tighter, districts became less willing to send teachers to professional development out of state resulting in diminished opportunities to deepen their knowledge of mathematics and how kids best learn the subject. Instead of dropping the hat and calling it a day, however, Mount Holyoke took this as a challenge and developed a way to connect teachers to the college without needing to put these teacher-students through the expense of travel and accommodations. We met with Michael Flynn - director of Mathematics Leadership Programs - and Megan Allen - a visiting lecturer in education and program developer - to discuss their solution and how Zoom plays into it.

Adapting to a New Climate

"I was looking for ways to better connect with teachers who were seeking development opportunities without forcing them to bear travel costs and other stresses," said Flynn. "Over the years, districts have begun to cut back on costs, which made them less likely to send over teachers and pay for their hotels. To help with this issue, I turned to Megan Allen, who provided insight into video conferencing by demonstrating how useful Zoom is in the classroom, having used this software in her own classes."

Megan Allen's solution was to tear down the barriers that forced teachers to restrict themselves in the four walls of the classroom. She came up with the idea of using our software to help foster collaboration with remote teachers without losing anything in terms of the quality of service delivered.

Allen relayed a story about a time her Mount Holyoke Class was collaborating with a class at Virginia Commonwealth University and a teacher lead in Mississippi. The VCU class was snowed in, so over 20 students used Zoom to attend from their living rooms. "We had to

connect with teachers across the nation using a solution that allowed us to collaborate and really meet in a way that was similar to in-person meetings," said Allen.

Flynn and Allen take two different approaches to using Zoom:

"I'm running my courses completely online, so I have a class that meets once a week completely on Zoom," said Allen. "Michael has more of a blended learning method, where he meets in-person with some of his students while also Zooming with others that could not physically attend classes."

The Zoom Experience

Despite the differences in their teaching methods, there is one single goal in mind: facilitating Zoom to establish a collaborative network of students that receive the same experience through a remote meeting environment as they would in an in-person setting.

"A lot of the coursework in my department involves hands-on learning," Flynn describes. "Every time we tried doing this online, it would fall flat because of the constraints in the software. **With Zoom, however, we were able to have teachers around the world using the software to interact in real time with our classroom.** Since math is a difficult language to reproduce on a keyboard, it's generally been problematic at best to enable collaboration on math-related coursework through simple screen sharing. **Zoom's annotation tool makes it possible for people to write mathematical expressions on a screen as they would on paper, allowing them to seamlessly express their ideas with their peers without having to resort to more frustrating alternatives.**"

Dynamic Courses and Math "Play Dates"

Flynn has a handy hardware setup in which the camera he uses is able to pan and zoom directly at active speakers, making the entire experience on the remote end of things much more immersive. The screen on the local end is large enough that students in the classroom are able to interact with remote participants and see the materials that they present.

"Our hardware setup created this very nice dynamic atmosphere where our remote students wouldn't just see some static mounted camera, but be able to explore the classroom in the same way that they would if they were actually sitting in it."

The collaborative environment fostered by Zoom was enough to give Flynn's students some extra initiative to organize group sessions in their own time. "Some of my students organized meetings on their own which they jokingly referred to as 'math play dates,'" said Flynn. "In these sessions, they created small professional learning communities in which they discussed course materials independently."

It Boils Down to Engagement

The students have become equally engaged regardless of whether they were connected remotely or sitting behind a classroom desk.

"We had a teacher in Seattle who would wake up at the early hours of the morning to attend our classes," he said. "These students stayed with us from 8:30 in the morning until 4:30 in the afternoon regardless of time zone. They were able to commit to sitting entire weeks at their computers. This level of commitment was the result of how active and dynamic the courses were and how well Zoom's platform supported the work. Part of this had to do with the fact that **the connection never experienced any lag or other noticeable issues with the technology.**"

The Seattle student Flynn referred to earlier only signed up for a week to test out the experience. After the week was over, she asked Flynn to sign her up for another week. Zoom has played an unequivocal role in student engagement by providing a **flexible, easy-to-use, and intuitive cloud meeting platform that places collaboration first.** This naturally creates the framework with which customers can use their ingenuity and arrange meetings in diverse ways that provoke engagement and strike the right chords.

"We now offer our services to a global audience," said Flynn. **"They were blown away by our capabilities largely because of our use of Zoom.** People who have been in our program for a long time have mentioned that we've achieved something very powerful using this new software. We now have this dynamic online experience that's unlike anything that's out there."



About Zoom

Zoom, the cloud meeting company, unifies cloud video conferencing, simple web meetings, and group collaboration into one easy-to-use platform. Our solution offers the first available mobile-screen sharing and an innovative hybrid cloud service, and works across desktop, tablet, mobile and room systems. Zoom services over 40 million participants and more than 100,000 businesses globally.

Website
zoom.us

Innovations

First 3-in-1 Cloud HD Meeting Platform
First Mobile Screen Sharing
First Hybrid Cloud Service