

Follow-up Meeting 1 with Participant 6

CH: Okay. And, and firstly, thank you so much for letting me join, um, your [Communications] session. Um, it's a, it is such a different experience to, in the distance space, to what we see obviously on a campus perspective. So, it was really interesting to see how the students were engaging and that. Um, and, and one student has a good sense of humor.

P6: Ya. Definitely, no definitely. They, it is a very, like as I said to you in our...when I, we initially met, it is very, very different because, you know, over the years you sort of get accustomed to the different formats in terms of the space. And these students, um, they don't want the warm and fuzzy and the entertainment. They just want to know, "Okay. Well, what do I need to do? What did I do right? What did I do wrong? Where should I be at?" And they want to be in and out. And that is just the nature of, unfortunately, the way it is. So, it is a very different beast altogether.

CH: Mm-hmm. Okay. Now, um, [Jade], when I sent you the interview schedule, when I gave you the hard copies, please tell me that they had a back to it. That I didn't just give you the front.

P6: Let me see...Let me just grab, let me just grab my, my folder here... Just quickly. At the moment, my life is, uh, I am, I have got so many balls in the air if I blink... Okay. Right. So, the observation schedule, examination artifacts, interview, schedule. Yes, it does have a back.

CH: Oh, good. Because I discovered one without a back. So, I was a little bit horrified. It was like, Ooh, maybe I didn't give the back."

P6: <Laugh>.

CH: Okay. Um, if you want an electronic copy, I can send it to you. Otherwise...

P6: No problem.

CH: Would you like an electronic copy?

P6: No, it's fine. No problem. It's fine. Thanks.

CH: Ok, cool. Okay, so [Jade], I am going to get into it, um, because I know time is of such value, um, and, and that you are very busy. So, I am going to work through some of these questions, um, systematically that you will have in front of you. Um, and, and you know, with the online lecture, and you have already spoken to the distance space being a different beast, um, to, one that we would have with synchronous, um, on a campus. But what do you consider your primary responsibility as a lecturer in the online space?

P6: Well, I think it's, it is very different to the role when it comes to face-to-face. In that face-to-face, you really are daisy chaining the content and taking the students through a

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lot more detail when it comes to online. Um, but with regards to the distance and the school of distance and that, and these distance students, I found that your role, I mean, is more one of coordinator. It is not really one of, well, I suppose we called online tutors, which I can't say we are not, but it is more, I think, an educational coordinator. That is what I would say, because our role is more to, yes, we do provide the resources, we direct them to how to use the platform, [the institution's online platform], we upload a lot of our own material and tips, but it is a consistency... You almost feel that one respect you are coordinator and the other respect you are a bit of a cheerleader and providing reassurance and guidance. So, um, ya, that, that, I know that is a very mixed-up way of explaining it. But it's, you know, you have these individuals and up until Covid it was mostly a different demographic in terms of, you know, someone going back to study a lot later in life. But I find now since Covid with the economic, um, context changing, there is a lot of students who ordinarily would have been afforded the opportunity to study face-to-face, the campus itself. But now economically, are not afforded that opportunity and have to go and work. So, we are finding a lot of, uh, uh, a bit of a change in terms of the age demographic that is coming through. But I would say, still say, that 70% of the students are definitely career orientated and a lot older. And this, this makes life a lot easier because, um, you know, they understand responsibilities and understand meeting deadlines, et cetera, et cetera. But I am finding now in the last two years that that 30% is creeping in. It is very similar to, you know, the, the age group that we have on campus.

CH: Ya. And it, it adds a complexity then to your role.

P6: Yes, yes.

CH: And then, so you have spoken about, you know, the cheerleader role, um, the fact that you are looking to motivate, you are looking to reassure them, you are looking to guide them. How do you go about achieving this in your online sessions then?

P6: Okay, so what we do is, and I mentioned it briefly to you when we met, it's, it is really, it's, it is something very simple in that trying to maintain a consistency of presence. So, um, you know, to feel, for them to feel that you are approachable and that you are there. So, what I do is every Monday morning, I send them an email early in the morning and, um, I will line it up to the progress of where they should be at in that potential week. So, I will say like, for instance, "This week, it is week 12, this is where you should be at in terms of content. This is, this is the assignment that you should be focusing on. You should be in the planning stages, blah, blah, blahdy, blahdy, blah." And then I will throw in a bit of a resource tool, like a link for referencing, or I will remind them of the online writing center. So, every Monday morning, that is what I will do. I will look at the pacing, and then I will give them something to help them for the week, uh, to facilitate the whole aspect of studying online and to try and encourage them to use the resources. Because, you know, just as we have become more sophisticated in the resources we have at campus level, with online now we have also got the, um, the online writing center like we do at campus level. We have got the, we have now got a full-time online librarian for the last month. So, you know, we try to...

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CH: Which is lovely.

P6: Yes. It is lovely. It is lovely. Because before we had, I mean, we had two, uh, we had [Jill] and [Jennifer] who are lecturers that would help out, but now we have got a full-time librarian and, which is great. So, trying to, that is what I do on a Monday. Then on a Friday, um, because the weekend is coming up and that is when most of them do their work, on a Friday, I will touch base again through email and announcement. So I will just obviously make the announcement option so it goes out as an email as well. And I will just reflect on the fact of what they should have been doing that week and, um, encourage them to get something done for the weekend or, you know, look to the next week, et cetera, et cetera. So, I think that is very, very important. And I try and keep the tone- it is a difficult one because, you know, in the online space and in the world of digital communication, one tries to keep the tone conversational, but obviously also we are an educational institution. So, you have got to try and balance the two. Um, but I try without overstepping the line, I try and keep the tone as friendly as possible, um, so that I keep the door open in terms of the fact that I am approachable. Um, and I do find... So that is what I do. And I do find, I don't, as I mentioned to you, I don't, so there is that, that I do. And then I do have, and for years, I have, as I explained to you the first time we met, I have never been on a WhatsApp group. I just, I can't. It just would drive me mad. Um, so I have got that link person on the WhatsApp group and um, I develop a relationship with that person. And it is quite nice because what I have noticed now is that by default, if you manage to land the right person as the link between yourself and the student, it is carried over to the next year. So, it is interesting, this group that you are sitting in on, Angela, who wasn't sitting, she wasn't in our [webinar] when we sat in last, because she has got some second year and first year modules. So, there is a bit of a clash. But I had her as my link between the group when they first started. And now I have got her this year again, or should I said this semester again. Um, and so that person is, is quite key because ya, they will, they will filter through and let you know of what is going on on the group or student requests, et cetera, et cetera. So, I try and still keep the WhatsApp door open- if that is a phrase we can use. Um, and then going back to the emails, we get a lot of emails. A lot. And what I would do...

CH: Sorry for interrupting you. Are they interacting via email to you?

P6: Yes, yes. I am finding, and it is very time consuming, I must be honest. I, I wake up most mornings and, um, before I even get going for the day with family, whatever have you, literally for the first half an hour to 45 minutes, that is all I do, is answer emails. And I think we have got a 48-hour turnaround time and, um, we are not supposed to answer on weekends, but I just find that, and I tell my students at the start of the year that I will check my emails once a day in the early morning and I will answer, but please don't expect me to answer in five minutes. So, they sort of get into that routine. And if there is, if there are emails, you know, during the weekend and specifically if an assignment is due, if I am able, I'll, I will answer. But, um, you know, sometimes family demands take over and you don't. But during the week, I will make it my priority that every morning I address emails, so the students know that there is a hard turnaround or quick turnaround time, so then they sort of trust that email, uh, platform a little bit more.

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CH: So interesting the consistency, [Jade], that you are bringing in, even with the Monday and the Fridays, the consistency of when you do your emails.

P6: Yes. Yes. And it is meeting, I think it is setting up expectations and then meeting those expectations. You know, we had a bit of a rocky start of the, of the semester with, well, the whole year with [the online portal], but then with distance had a bit of a rocky start with the systems as well as integration. And, um, when talking to [Joan] as well, and you know, she, they obviously wanted to find out how things were going and I said to them that, you know, for me, it is all about consistency at the end of the day. And, and that even when students, one or two students didn't have access to [the institution's online platform] and, and we are feeling a bit anxious, even just emailing them and sending them material and telling them that you are there and that you are accessible to a degree, it is a huge help. Um, and, you know, coming from a professional environment before I got into academics, um, I think consistency is everything when it comes to your, your people—be it employees or be it your students, is that you are consistent. Because then they know what to expect at the end of the day.

CH: Okay, cool. And then moving now towards the graduate attributes. Um, so preparing students for the 21st century workplace, I mean, that is something that we often speak about. Um, in the teaching and learning strategy document, it is also about preparing students so that they can become responsible citizens and contributing citizens to the economy. What skill sets do you consider important for the students to develop?

P6: Uh, you know, it's, it is a difficult one for distance. Because if you were asking this question about our face-to-face students, it would be a lot more obvious. Because obviously we are preparing them for the working world. We are preparing them for, um, the environment, et cetera, et cetera. And as I mentioned at the start of our conversations, 70% of the distance students have already been in the working world for 15, 20, 30 years. So, for them, I think it is the other way around. You know, they come from the working world, it is now preparing them for the academic world, and they find it quite daunting. I mean, last year I had someone, she was 65 years old, and she was studying and doing her degree. So, I think for them it is the other way around. And it is just as frightening, um, as it is for our students preparing for from campus-level for career. These students find the career environment and work environment less daunting. They find academics very daunting because it is a very long time since many of them have been there. And also they find the online space and the technology daunting. So for me, for me it's, um...well, and, and getting them to use [the institution's online platform] as a platform and encouraging them to interact because a lot of them are, are just scared. Not necessarily primarily of the studying, but of the online platform itself and the hesitancy of the technology that is required.

CH: And have you seen over the year, um, because you obviously had these students first semester and now you are seeing them second semester, um, are you seeing that engagement on [the institution's online platform] now taking place? Did you see it immediately in first semester? Or did you see it, uh, you know, how has that, that developed?

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P6: I definitely think, yes, I definitely think that the first semester you have them (it is obviously also dependent on the group and the dynamics of the group, but for this particular group, and the norm), I think is the first semester, they are just trying to find their feet. Um, and, and the big one is the whole issue of intellectual, intellectual, um, credibility and coming to terms with the whole referencing and integrity and that kind of thing. That is a big, a big one for them. So, in second semester, they are a little bit more relaxed because they understand [the institution's online platform] as a platform. They understand the expectations in terms of, um, uh, referencing in terms of, uh, integrity when it comes to intellectual integrity. So, they are a little bit more relaxed. And they also understand the mechanics of, you know, how to find the links, how to submit, how to use the writing center, the online library, et cetera, et cetera. So, second semester I definitely see the relationship side develop more, whereas first semester they are just trying to find their way.

CH: Okay. And, and going back to, okay, so you said the, the significant difference for distance students is that they are more familiar with the career and working world already.

P6: Yes.

CH: That they are needing preparation for the academic, um, environment. So, what skill-sets, besides from intellectual integrity, do you consider quite important then in preparing them for the academic role?

P6: I think, um, I think number one, which is something which, which we take for granted is the ability to express yourself, um, in terms of the written form. I mean, the last time most of them were studying was grade 12. And if you ask them when they last wrote an essay, the ability to actually compile academic material, for them, I think, that is difficult. Um, and that, that takes, takes time and... And a huge difference, I mean, these students that you are observing are BA but I mean, I also have the BCom and that is even more of a leap for them. But the ability to, um, develop academic content at a tertiary level, it takes a lot of them quite some time to understand that expectation. Um, that for me is, that for me is definitely a big one. And then obviously number two would...

CH: And [Jade], would you say that...and I'm sorry to interrupt. But would you, would you say there is a difference between, because that, that is linked to communication, would you say that that is different to articulating something verbally? Is it a different skill set? Or do you feel it is one and the same? The written and verbal?

P6: I, well, look, I think there is a link, but, um, I don't know, in my, in my personal opinion, you can, I can have students that are verbally very articulate, but it doesn't translate into written. Which sometimes surprises me and I am sure that you see that, even in the lecturing space, that a student can be amazing from a verbal, verbal perspective, but it doesn't necessarily translate into the written content itself.

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CH: Cool. Because I think it is quite an important distinction for communication, the ability to communicate through written and the ability to communicate verbally. So, I am always interested to see the perceptions.

P6: Most, and most definitely, for instance, when we start with a new group and we start on in the distance space and we start running [webinars], and then one of two students will stand out because they are always on the [webinars], they are always contributing and interacting and they are always contacting you through emails, et cetera, et cetera. And then when their first submission comes, um, their confidence, their articulation verbally doesn't match necessarily the skill in terms of the academic content.

CH: Ya. Okay. I am sorry for interrupting you. So, I know there was a second skill set.

P6: No, no problem. I was saying that tech technology, because um, they don't quite know. And this whole issue of [the institution's online platform] and, uh, the platform and the fact that it is an interactive platform and a service platform, it takes them quite some time to understand, understand that platform, that it's a one-stop shop. So, for me, that is something else which takes time for them to get across at the end of the day.

CH: Okay. Um, have you seen, because I haven't gone into to your module yet, I want, I want your view of things here before I go into...

P6: Yes.

CH: ...to the actual module. Do you feel that the students, um, have started to engage with the different type of tools within [the institution's online platform]? Or are they predominantly referring to a specific activity or tool?

P6: Uh, to be honest with, to be honest with you, when it comes to the distance students, because of their lack of time and having families and careers, et cetera, et cetera. They will just take what they need. So, we were actually having a chat about this. Um, [Joan] has a meeting for the lead OTs every Thursday. She calls it an open mic session, and we basically just winge and moan and give feedback and what is working, what is not working. And um, what a lot of us have started to notice over the, the last few years and myself too, is that, um, we are not putting, we are not uploading as much content as we used to because students are only taking what they need. For instance, um, you know, the actual curriculum content, so the module guide, the assignments, um, ICE tasks, uh, support slides, that kind-of-thing, um, guidance on referencing and intellectual integrity, that, that kind-of-thing. So, um, essentially, essentially, uh, the bare essentials, um, and to equip them with what they need to succeed for the module. Ya, that is more the way it is going and it's, you know, it is not necessarily the way it should be. But, um, we are noticing, and, and other OTs too, the feedback is coming that students aren't using all the bells and whistles. So ya.

CH: Okay.

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P6: Definitely is changing. And I think that's a time thing in terms of how much time they have to spend. Because bearing in mind some of these students are, um, have the... For instance, the one gentleman I interacted with last week, he was 40 years old, coming back to study for the first time and he had registered for four modules, and he was finding it quite overwhelming.

CH: Ya. He would.

P6: So ya, ya, ya. <laugh>

CH: And, and it is difficult. I mean, if you look at them coming back, it's the expectations. Um, and I don't think they realize the academic expectations that are required from them.

P6: No, they don't. I think they have been away from the academic environment for so long that, and, and many of them, grade 12 was their last, was their last frame of reference. So, I think they're very, they are very optimistic in terms of how they want their studies to, to play out or to run, but when they are ready to fulfill the requirements, um, especially now with the arts course, the Bachelor of Arts course where there is now two assignments and they are normally like a month apart, four weeks, three to four weeks apart. And I see students say, ya, they struggle with that, they struggle with that in terms of having multiple modules. So ya, I think they underestimate the demand of what the online studies take. Sorry, can I be very rude? ...[[Jade] takes a call from a family member] Sorry about that.

CH: No problem. Life happens. That is one thing I do know. So [Jade], so we have spoken about technology, we have spoken about intellectual integrity, we have also spoken about the importance for them to be able to articulate something in the written form. Um, just going back to that written form and the assignments. So, you spoke about two assignments, um, that is required from them. Is there any higher-order thinking that is required from the students? Or do you feel that it is more content, um, that it, it is to your lower order thinking that is really just touching on content and getting an understanding of content in, in your particular module?

P6: Well, what I've, what I have noticed, and it is very pleasing in terms of the way the development is, um, changing, is that, I mean, this course that you are observing, this [module] is a very basic introductory course. And then they, you know, they jump next year to organizational communication and persuasive communication, which is far more demanding. So, I just, I give them some insight and say, "Listen, you know, you should be making hay while the sun shines the first-year. It's basic concepts, et cetera, et cetera. Um, but once you get to second-year, um, it's definitely from the, the demand in terms of the assessments grows." But what I have noticed, for instance, just with this first-year module, is their first assignment consisted of very basic content for two questions and then a 50-mark essay. But now for the second assignment, they have got two adverts that they have to analyze and then they have got to essentially take the required theory and link the content and the advert to the theory. And they struggle with that. Um, so I've, the, [institution] has started to consider the higher-order thinking, I feel because both for

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first semester and for second semester, which is this course you are observing, their second assignment requires the students to watch- one is a video, the other two or two ads- and then link the theory to the application of the content. So, the higher-order needs start to come through in the second assignment, which is, which is good because, um, the first assignment is very straightforward and just, uh, looking essentially at, at, at basic content, um, comprehension. So, I think assignment two definitely starts to link to what will be expected of second year. So definitely for, I would say more higher-order thinking for assignment two, but not necessarily for assignment one. Which is pleasing to see...

CH: Ya.

P6: ...because in years gone by, it would be different.

CH: And, and [Jade] then looking at, um, assignment two, um, how do you get them to, to start thinking and applying, so applying the theory to it and getting them to analyze that, what techniques do you use for your students there?

P6: Well, what I do with, you know, obviously it is very different face-to-face where you can physically brainstorm it and break away, uh, into groups, et cetera, et cetera. And, and in class. So, what I do with the online space is quite a few weeks before we start focusing on assignment two in-depth and we have the national support session for assignment two is I start telling them to watch the adverts and contextualize the adverts. Then we discuss them and then there is a, a rubric, very importantly, and this is where these rubrics really help from a standardization point of time. Then I say to them right now that you have contextualized the advert, now go back and link the demands of the rubric to the context of the advert. Then we have a session where we, we brainstorm, um, and it is obviously limit limited to when it, when it comes to distance because you can't do as much as when you are face-to-face. Um, but that is essentially how I structure it... Is that trying to introduce them to, um, the actual, the visual component (so the video or the adverts) and get context on it and then link it to the rubric. And then only have the discussion on the assignment and, you know, get feedback from, from the students. But this is the first year that they have done that, Chantal. It is the first year that they have actually changed assignment two. And that, and that applies in the face-to-face format as well for first year. So, it is pleasing to see that the [institution's] development is now moving with the second assignment, uh, to link it to what will be expected, which is definitely far more higher-order in terms of the needs ranking for, for second-year.

CH: Cool. Okay. And then, um, moving on to question three. Um, what is your understanding of graduate attributes?

P6: My understanding of graduate attributes is that essentially the attributes that a graduate will leave, I wouldn't say leave with, will graduate with that will make them an asset in the workplace. Make them an asset in whatever context they will be employed in thereafter. So that to me, in a basic way, would be what graduate attributes are.

CH: And what do you consider the assets? <laugh>.

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P6: Yow well, there is the whole fairy-tale and then there is a reality. Um,

CH: Well, let's look at reality. <laugh>.

P6: Yes. Let's look at reality <laugh>. I, often, and again, I use this word a lot, I tell my, tell my students the whole aspect of consistency, that they are going to be consistent. Because coming from the working environment, I mean, I have academics by default, but coming from the working environment, that is what all employees look for is consistency. Not one hit-wonders the one day and then down the doldrums the next day. So definitely consistency. And I think a big one for me, and especially because we are in this whole digital age, is the aspect of integrity, um, which students don't really...they understand- yes, when you, you know, when you start, uh, poking the bear with regards to what integrity is- they don't really understand it. But, um, specifically in the online age, I mean, uh, definitely, I mean mine is a communications, public relations, marketing, uh, background is that, uh, I mean you only have one chance in this particular age to make an impression. And your reputation can be ruined within hours because of how things can go viral. Um, just looking at integrity and what that integrity means. Um, and then definitely their reputation because whether we like it or not, the way that these graduates use social media does impact on, on how they are perceived. Um, and ya, that is more from a, I would say, more from an 18 to 25-year old's perspective. But now from a distance perspective, uh, obviously the attributes are at the end of the day to make them more marketable so that they can climb the corporate ladder. That is why, that is why a lot of them are studying. Most of them are studying.

CH: Do you think that it's just the paper, the qualification itself, or do you think there's certain skill-sets that they acquire with the qualification that makes them more marketable?

P6: Um, you know, it is a bit difficult to comment honestly with distance because you don't get to know those students as well as what you do in the face-to-face space. But, but I would say that, um, it surprises me when you, you know, I set an ICE task when I meet the students for the first time, and I tell them "On a A4 page, compile a profile of you as a person", and I don't give them too much guidance. "I don't want a CV. Tell me who you are. Give me a bit of a rundown of what you have done in your life up until now." And then when I read those, some of the students have such a varied background in terms of where they currently are employed or perhaps have studied in the past or, and not completed qualifications, and where they are currently working versus the actual qualification that they are taking on. So, I would say one could probably infer that a lot of them are, they are wanting to make a change in their lives. They are wanting to make a change- that they, they currently are working, they have industry experience, but you know, this is not really their dream, or this is not really their passion. Um, so when I look at their, where they currently are and where they have come from, you know, you look at that whole career tree, this is a complete 360 to what they are currently doing. Which I see a lot of, um, which interests me. It is very interesting. Um, ya. But as I say, so ya, we, we, you know, with a distance student, we don't get to know them as well in terms of as what we would our students at campus level.

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CH: Okay. And then it wouldn't be a resilience issue anyway. It is not really the resilience that you are looking for.

P6: No. No. Sorry, I told you this- when someone arrives home, all heck breaks loose with the dogs. <laugh>.

CH: No problem. <laugh>. It is a normal type of environment. <laugh>. Um, [Jade], moving to question four, what techniques or strategies do you use in the online space to encourage engagement from your students?

P6: Well, again, um, I think the whole aspect of consistency comes in there because then, uh, they know what to expect from me. So, they then in turn communicate with me. But right from day one, um, I encourage them to email me at any stage and I put that out there and I encourage that for the first few weeks. Um, and when it comes to the online sessions, um, it is a bit of, a bit of a, a bit of a balancing act because you have obviously got only really half an hour to 40 minutes to spend with them before they need to go or lose interest. I try and push for interaction. So, I try and ask questions. Um, most of them are more comfortable, um, you know, typing in the text box. But as I get to know the names, I call on them by their names, which is a bit of, a bit of a risky thing because you can sometimes just get, uh, white noise when you call on them, um, and they get offended, or they don't want to be put on the spot or whatever have you. But I try in a lecture, I test the waters and I try in every session to, uh, call on one or two to actually put their mics on and speak to them. And then it seems to encourage the others in sessions down the line and I don't put them on the spot and ask them a question that is going to make them uncomfortable in front of their peers. So, I try that. I do that with the face-to-face students as well, but I am a bit more forceful because obviously I know the students and I will say, I will say, "Hey, why aren't you turning your mic on? Are you busy watching Netflix and not listening to me? Or what are you doing?" But obviously I can't do that in the distance space <laugh>. So, I tried, I am far more tentative in the online space.

CH: I observed that [Jade] <laugh>, I observed how you used just one or two names to call on them to use the mic and, and there was good humor because that poor person was eating supper. So <laugh>, it was...

P6: Yes, yes.

CH: ...it became humorous as well. So, do you use a lot of humor in your other sessions or was it just specific to that particular session?

P6: Well, you know, you know, personally, and this probably gets me into trouble, I feel that, you know, a lot of academics take themselves very seriously and that sometimes puts people off. So, I try and just show them that, you know, like we had incidences like with what happened now where the dogs bark, whatever have you. And I try, you know, I try to use humor to basically just show them that, you know, we are all in the same boat. That I understand their stresses and that it is everyday life. And you know, they, when we have our [webinars], you know, they have got family at home, and they are

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cooking dinner and they are trying to run around and do everything. So I just try to be just as natural and as real as possible. But I think humor does minimize a bit of, you know, breaks down that wall to a degree. Um, and ya, maybe if you were one day to sit in on the session with the second years, you would be horrified because some of them are already, it is like, uh, they have been together for two years now. And this is the longest we have had students together in the BA space because distance has only been running for two years in the BA space. It has been running for five years with the BCom. Um, and ya, people start to, you know, you start to hear about, for instance, uh, in the second-year space, one of the students, um, she is over in the States and she was affected by this Hurricane Ian. And we spent like two minutes chatting about if she is okay and you know, what is going on over there. And everyone was so empathetic and you know, there was this camaraderie there already with that group. But they have been together for two years. Um, and then they will tease me about one or two things, you know, like you saw on that, you heard about the ICE tasks, you know, I gave them quite demanding ICE tasks, and I still stand by the fact that it is going to help them with the take-home exam. Um, so, you know, ya, we have a bit of banter, which I think is a good thing.

CH: Ya, I think it was lovely to see that relationship.

P6: Ya. You know, the thing is, at the end of the day, personally, like I said to you when we first met, um, I just think that it's, it is all about the environment and relationships. If you can't, if people can't relate to you and if there is no connection, no matter what you are trying to do, no matter how good an educator you are, if that relationship is not there, um, it is not going to work. And it's a, it is different. In the distance space, it is different, but I think it takes a lot longer to cultivate that relationship in the distance space because you don't have all the non-verbal elements that you have face-to-face.

CH: Ya because they can't put on their actual cameras, because that affects...

P6: Yes.

CH: ...that affects connectivity. So, you do look at the grey screen, <laugh>.

P6: Yes, no, definitely, definitely, definitely. You know, and, and the thing is, it is also that, you know, many of them when I have, when they are beginning, when I have given those a chance who want to switch on their cameras, they are reluctant to switch on their mics! So, asking for the camera is another whole... And then you just, and you will find that they won't come back. They will miss one or two because they are scared you are going to put them on the spot again. So, it's, it is a balancing act. It really, really is.

CH: Okay. Then, um, with regards to technologies and that because they are navigating [the institution's online] space, what type of technologies do you use? Uh, you know, PowerPoints? Do you use any apps that you bring into the actual online sessions? Do you get them in an, in an asynchronous space to engage with, with any other technologies?

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P6: I would say, you know, to be honest with you, that I, that I reserve far more for my face-to-face students. With regards to the distance students. PowerPoint would be the, you know, with, with regards to the kind of slides and that, that I use and that I direct them to. Um, I do refer them to or give them links to go and do additional reading or articles. I give suggestions in terms of, for instance, uh, you know, academic search engines and where to go and have a look and how to improve. But to be honest with you, we have limited time with the distance students. I try and drive them to... Number one, many of them need help with their writing. So, I try and drive them to the online writing center and I will show them how to access it and how to book an appointment. Or I try and drive them to the online librarian. Or I will refer them to a wealth of- I create a referencing folder on my various groups. And in there, um, I give a whole presentation on referencing using PowerPoint. And then I give them links of YouTube clips and, uh, some of the [webinars], old [webinars] links made by the online librarian and made by various people to give different perspective. So, I drive them to that. I find that, you know, when you try, when you try and play or entertain with apps with the distance students, it falls flat. That is just my personal opinion. I find it works far better in a, in a classroom or lecture-room environment.

CH:

And [Jade], do you ever use like the poll on [the webinar] or not?

P6: Yes, I do. I do. I do. I do, I... also the break-away teams? You know, when we break, break them away into groups like that, I do. Um, I found that has fallen flat for me though, to be honest. When I get them to, to, to break away because the time is so limited. Um, the polls, I do. But I normally, I normally do that towards the end of, excuse me, the semester, once we have, um, you know, once we are building up to exam time, I find that that definitely works. But again, the distance space is a different beast. As I said those students want value for their money. They want to cash in- what do I need to, what do I need to do? Where am I at? What have I missed? What can you give me? And then they want to cash out.

CH: Um, okay.

P6: Whereas it is very different with our students in a lecturing environment.

CH: Okay. And, and just obviously in the online space, I mean, we have recently had load-shedding. I mean, they keep changing the schedules and I am so grateful that KZN had the floods- that is one positive that has come out where we don't get as much load-shedding.

P6: <Laugh>.

CH: But what challenges have you experienced in preparing for your online, um, sessions and creating these learning opportunities for students?

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P6: Okay, so, so just from a hardware/ infrastructure point of view, um, where we live, we don't have, we don't have fibre. So, we haven't got that option. But I mean, even if the power went down, okay, we wouldn't use our fiber. But so what we have had to do is we have actually had to, with the load-shedding, we have noticed that, um, in the last, I would say year, year and a half, the towers have seemed to have taken a big knock. And they, you know, the main service providers aren't renewing the batteries. So, I don't know if you have also noticed, but, so depending where you are at, when the power goes off, that is it, your connectivity goes down straight away. So what we had to do is we have now had to install a, I think it's regardless of the fact that we live in the bundus, I think it is affecting everyone whether, even if you are living in the CBD or closer to the CBD, we have had to install a new, antenna onto our roof and we now have a private provider called Eaglenet. We feed off their tower. So even when load-shedding hits and we can't use, uh, and we, and we can't use the main towers, we are actually feeding off, off a private provider now. Um, and their service is far more consistent. So that is what we have, we have had to do. Um, and then obviously we have got an inverter as well too in terms of, so power, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, for our laptops and the basics. But students, um, we even have had some humorous stories where when load-shedding got really bad in July, you know, where students will be sitting in their car and, uh, they are using their car charger to charge their phone and still listening to you in their car.

CH: That is dedication, isn't?

P6: <Laugh>, that's dedication.

CH: And is that not innovation just there? It's innovative thinking, <laugh>.

P6: So ya. So those are the kind of things you come up against. Um, but I think regardless, I, to be honest with you, I have to date, I have been lecturing for distance, I think, five going on six years now, and, um, ya, we haven't, I haven't, I haven't canceled the session because of load-shedding. I feel, I think the onus is obviously on me as the OT, whether it means that you must drive to a campus or do whatever have you. Um, because even if the student can't join the [webinar], they expect that recording and they expect that [webinar] to go ahead.

CH: Okay. And you have got lots of back-up plans to ensure that you can continue.

P6: We have. You have to. You have to. Because I mean, this is South Africa. What else can we do? I mean, ya, ya. It must go on. Everything needs to go on. What else can we do? And you know, that is the mindset maybe- I think, you know, those of us, I mean, we all travel, and I say to students, when you come back to South Africa- that is one of the things that keeps a lot of us coming back. We just get on with it. Don't make excuses. And my, my son will tell you, he actually embarrassed me with a conversation with someone and he said, "Don't give my mom excuses. She doesn't like excuses."

CH: <Laugh>. No, I think that is good.

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P6: I just like, you know, get it, get it done, carry on. And I tell students the same thing, you know, when they come onto campus during class, I said, "Then don't come up to me and give me excuses. Tell me what really happened. Yes. You couldn't submit the ICE task. Well, yes, whatever. Don't lie to me. Rather, tell me what really happened and let's fix it. But don't, don't come and give me excuses again. Let's make it, let's make it work. Let's fix it. But don't come with excuses." So ya, maybe that's, everyone has their own idiosyncrasies and that's, I suppose, is one of mine.

CH: Well, I think in some ways you are encouraging perseverance, you know.

P6: Definitely.

CH: Look, look for a way to overcome the particular problem is a skill-set that perhaps you are focusing on amongst the students. Whether it is your face-to-face students on campus, or whether it is your distance students.

P6: And specifically, with, you know, with the face-to-face, that generation. I think our students just, I think that- not students -that gener, this generation now, and I know they hate to be labeled Generation Z, but they don't have, they don't seem to have the same common sense and they don't seem to have the same chutzpah that was demanded of a different era. And that is what I, you know, try to encourage. "Listen, when you get out there into the working world..." You spoke just now about graduate attributes. You know, you can't use excuses, you can't. You are going to have deadlines. You know, it's, you think that you have got to deliver. So, this, the same applies here. Get used to delivering and don't make excuses and make it happen. So, ya. Um, and you know, and that is, I think, is the difference when you come from an industry background and go into lecturing versus if you have always just lectured. I mean, you know, you, that is it. You are responsible. In an industry environment, you are responsible for budgets, you are responsible for producing the goods and you can't sit in front of the powers that be, or in a boardroom meeting and... I mean, for years I worked for [...]. I was with [...] for 12 years and I would be often the only woman sitting at a boardroom meeting. And you know, you, you have got to deliver at the end of the day. Um, you know, <laugh>, you paid to be there, you have got to deliver. Excuses don't fly. So, with students, I know we have to package it a bit more eloquently, eloquently, but your excuses don't fly.

CH: Well, I, I think if they are sitting in the car charging their, their cell phones so that they can listen...

P6: <Laugh>.

CH: ...um, I think they are demonstrating some sort of, um, perseverance there. It also brings me to the last question, um, which is a focus in our Teaching and Learning, um, Strategy Policy. It speaks to the collaborative problem-solver. Um...

P6: Yes.

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CH: What is your understanding of collaborative learning?

P6: Collaborative learning is the fact that it is a partnership at the end of the day. That it is not one way. So, it, it takes two. It is at the end of the day, it definitely is the element of relationship, the element of, um, both parties need to be invested. That for me is the collaborative approach.

CH: Okay. And do you get opportunities to develop that collaborative learning in your online distance space?

P6: I would say, I would say that it is limited. The only way that we actually, to be honest, can see that progression and development, and I mentioned it in that [webinar] that you sat in on, is when we see the level of work students are submitting. That is the only way that we actually get to see. So, it is not directly, it doesn't directly link to collaboration, but it does show that they are actually using and are invested in your sessions because they are using what you have given them. And for that particular group of students, this particular group you are talking about their essays last semester versus their essays this semester are like chalk and cheese. And we have worked very hard on that. Um, and it was very pleasing to see. So, I think for me, that would be the closest we would come to even scratching the surface in terms of collaboration.

CH: Okay. And then switching to problem-solving. Um...

P6: Yes.

CH: ...do you incorporate activities that help students to problem-solve in the online space?

P6: Um, I would be, to be honest with you, I would say no. Because it doesn't lend itself, it doesn't lend itself to that. In the face-to-face environment, yes. In the online space, no. I think the closest we would come to problem-solving is essentially for them when they sit down and have been given all the tools. Um, and then to specifically when it's, there is a link, an assignment, or a link where there is a lot of theory linking to application, um, and setting that up. That would be the closest that comes to problem-solving. But distance doesn't facilitate, doesn't facilitate that. And you have such a mixture of individuals that you are catering to and some of them have got very high-ranking positions and you know, they are not there for that. They, they are there for the academic hat. Well, they are wearing the academic hat when they are in those [webinar] sessions. Um, so it is something which we need to look at. Um, and I will be interested specifically when we get to third-year because I have never moved to third year with a group where the issue of problem-solving will definitely come in with the nature of the submissions and the assessments. Um, but ya, it is, you know, there's, there is the fairy-tale. I would love to say yes. But if I am being honest, no,

CH: I want the honesty.

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P6: The time we have, ya, the time we have doesn't lend, it doesn't lend itself to that.

CH: Okay. Um, [Jade], thank you so much. Um, I truly did enjoy your, your online session. Um, and hearing the banter and just the type of relationship you have with your students and, and you had quite a few students joining you, that, that session. I don't know how big your actual class size is generally, but, um, it was a good representation of students, and it was, it was fun to hear them banter with you and, and having developed a relationship with you over time. So, I look forward to this evening. So, I know it is very different. So...

P6: Yes, this evening's more, ya, this evening is more prescriptive, but what I find is that I try and get that prescriptive session out of the way and then give them at least 15 to 20 minutes where they can take it wherever they want to take it, which I think it keeps it interactive. That is where the collaboration comes in, I think.

CH: Okay. And it is seven o'clock this evening. I did get the right time?

P6: Yes. It's seven, it is seven o'clock. It should probably last for, for 40 minutes, 45 minutes. Um, it all depends. What I need to do will be at least 25 minutes long and then there thereafter, um, I am going to try and get them, you know, to engage and to, to, to ask questions and to get to the core of what they might still need in terms of the approach to the assignment. Because it is all about the approach. Um, but ya, 40 minutes, probably 40, 45 minutes, but it is seven.

CH: Okay. Thanks so much for your time...

P6: Fantastic. It's a pleasure. Sorry about all the dogs barking...

CH:and I will see you later...

P6: dogs barking, children phoning...

CH: I can't hear the dog barking. I am happy to hear life is happening with <laugh>

P6: <laugh>. Thanks so much.