Bringing All Students onto Webcam Together for Special Circumstances: Using a Large Video Pod

Matthea Marquart

At times, instructors may want to bring all students onto webcam together. This chapter demonstrates an example of what this might look like.

Teaching and Learning Goal

In general, I do not ask students to be on webcam throughout a full class session, for reasons of equity, privacy, cognitive load, webcam fatigue, and attention to learning (Marquart & Russell, 2020; Marquart et al, 2021; Marquart et al, 2022). However, some classroom activities can benefit from having everyone on webcam together. In those cases, the goals of having everyone on webcam can include:

- Building community.
- Facilitating a discussion in which everyone can see each other

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Activity and Results

Activities that can benefit from having everyone on webcam together include:

- Some whole-class discussions can benefit from students being able to see each other.
- Before going into breakout group activities, it can be helpful to briefly bring everyone onto webcam together so that when the class transitions into breakout groups, everyone's ready to begin talking together. This can minimize the transition time before starting the small-group activity.
- Saying hello and chatting before class begins, during breaks, or after class ends. It can build community to get to know each other informally.
- Taking a class photo together on the last day of class, for those who would like to do this as an optional goodbye activity. When doing this, it's important to first agree as a class about how and where the photo can be shared. For example, the class may agree that the photo can or cannot be shared on social media.

In addition, some activities can use a similar layout but only entail bringing some of the students in the class onto webcam together, rather than all of the students. Activities that can benefit from having part of the class on webcam together include:

- Role play activities
- Fishbowl activities
- Panel discussions
- Breakout activity report-backs
- Debates

Technical Details and Steps

To bring the class onto webcam together, I created a classroom layout with a large Video pod (see **Image 1**). I made the Chat pod tall and narrow, so that many chat comments can be visible at once. This makes it easier to read the chat conversation than it would be to read it on a short and wide Chat pod where only a few chat comments can be visible at a time. I put the Chat pod on the left, so that the Chat is near the instructions and Attendees pod and all the text in the room is grouped together, with the rest of the layout dedicated to webcams.

What this looked like in Adobe Connect

Image 1. Example Adobe Connect layout with a large Video pod to demonstrate what this can look like. The screengrab was captured by the author while logging into the room using multiple Internet browsers and devices. As a note, many more webcams can be shown together in an Adobe Connect room, but the author ran out of devices to be able to include more webcam images in this screengrab. Adobe product screenshot(s) reprinted with permission from Adobe.

Image 1 Alt-Text. This is a screengrab of an Adobe Connect classroom layout designed to prioritize participation on webcam. On the far right side, there is a small Share pod showing a slide with the following instructions: "Please join us on webcam for a discussion." Below that is a narrow Attendees pod. Next, there is a narrow Chat pod stretching from the top to the bottom of the layout. The rest of the layout is one large Video pod that takes up about 75% of the layout. In the Video pod, there are 7 webcams, all showing the author of this chapter.
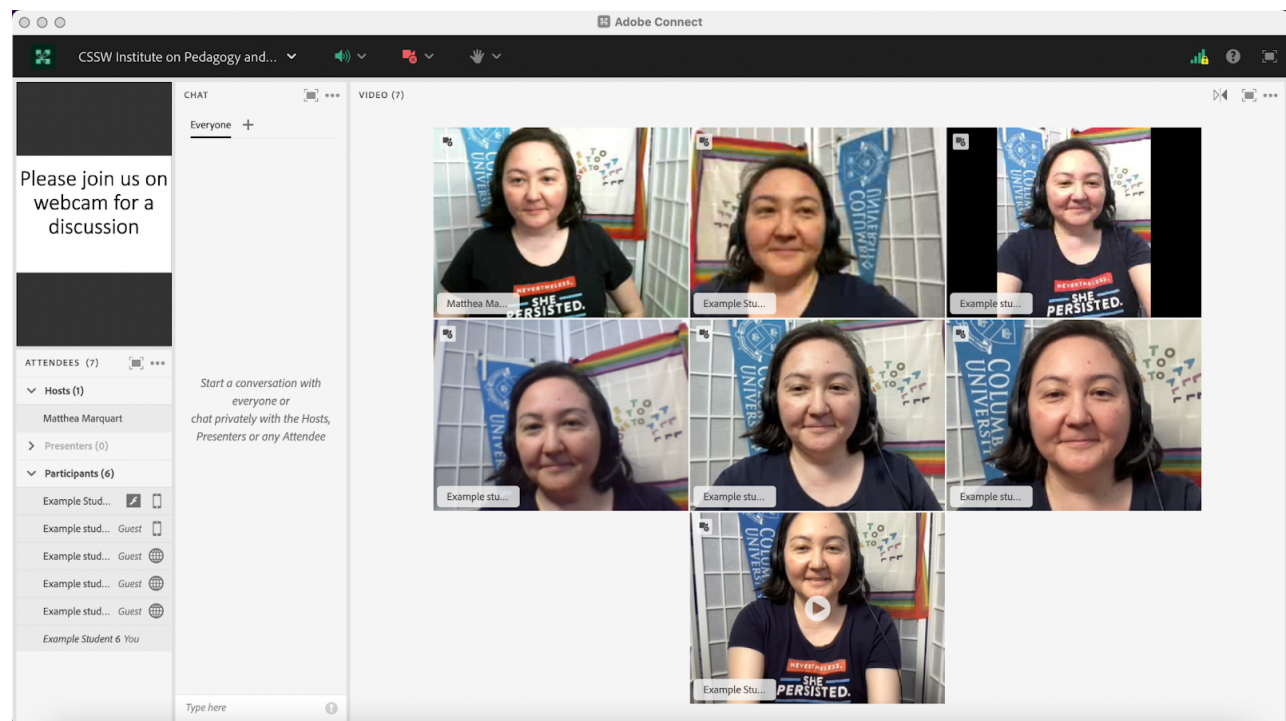
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Matthea Marquart is a social worker, leader, educator, and online education expert. She is the Assistant Dean of Online Education at Columbia University's School of Social Work (CSSW), a Senior Lecturer teaching innovative courses, and the creator and co-facilitator of CSSW's Institute on Pedagogy and Technology for Online Courses. She began working with CSSW's Online Campus in 2014 during beta testing and launch preparation, helped launch the Online Campus in 2015, and has focused on collaborating on the online program's continuous improvement and growth since then. Her team's work with CSSW's Online Campus has won numerous awards, including from the International E-Learning Association, the University Professional and Continuing Education Association, the United States Distance Learning Association, and Chief Learning Officer Magazine. Matthea publishes and presents frequently, including over 125 invited and refereed talks, workshops, keynote speeches, and conference sessions about education, training, teaching with technology, and nonprofit management.

She is honored to have been recognized by the Council on Social Work Education's Women's Council as a Feminist Mentor, by the Network for Social Work Management with an Exemplar Award for exemplary performance and leadership as a social work executive leader, by the White House and Americorps with a President's Gold Volunteer Service Award in recognition of volunteer service to community and country, and by the NYC chapter of the National Association of Social Workers with an Emerald Leadership Award for 16-25 years of exemplary leadership and contributions to the Social Work profession. Matthea began working in education in 1997, and in online education in 2008. She holds a BA in English from Emory University and an MS in Social Work from Columbia University. She is passionate about student-centered teaching and learning, and can be reached on Twitter, on LinkedIn, or on her website.

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