Digital Innovation: Zoom Fatigue

00:08–00:37

Andrew Coletti: Hello and welcome to this episode of The T in Teaching. This episode is the first episode in a series called Digital Innovation, where our host, Angelica Finley and Amy Safirstein Sharma, discuss new technologies, topics and techniques in online education. In this episode, our hosts will discuss an issue that most people have experienced: Zoom Fatigue. Thank you very much. Please enjoy.

00:38–00:44

Angelica Finley: Hello and welcome to the first episode of the Digital Innovation Series. I'm Angelica.

00:44–00:45

Amy Safirstein Sharma: And I'm Amy!

00:45–01:01

Angelica Finley: And we are glad to be here talking with you today. In this series, we'll be discussing some people or most people have experienced, which is Zoom fatigue. Amy, can you talk about a time where you felt Zoom fatigue, whether that be at work or in a class type of environment?

01:01–01:30

Amy Safirstein Sharma: Absolutely. I think we've all felt Zoom fatigue on both ends. As a professor and as well as the students on the presenter or professor side, I definitely have felt Zoom fatigue whenever students don't have their cameras turned on. It's almost like giving a regular presentation, but just to a wall instead of to attendees. You're giving jokes, you're explaining things, and you have no idea if those jokes are landing or if anyone's really paying attention by the end of your presentation.

01:30–01:50

Amy Safirstein Sharma: So it's pretty tiring, a little bit nerve wracking, not really knowing where you stand with your audience. And then from the other side, from the student side, you've got your camera on the entire time. Oftentimes, this is through really long lectures. There may not be breaks. You don't feel like you can really move around all that much because you've got to stay focused in the center of the camera.

01:50–02:13

Amy Safirstein Sharma: And additionally, you're paying attention to what you look like. So, this is how I figured out that my face is not perfectly symmetrical, and then I pay attention to that half of the class, so it can be tiring, not super helpful. That's where the Zoom fatigue comes into play on both sides of the coin there. So, let's turn it around and how can students noticing fatigue setting in?

02:13–02:20

Amy Safirstein Sharma: And I know that you've taught some classes. So as a professor yourself, how have you noticed Zoom fatigue setting in?

02:20–02:46

Angelica Finley: So there are a few reasons if you sort of cues. The first and most obvious would be just staring at a screen for a long period of time. So that sort of intense close up on a screen for it's usually over an hour or even more can really take a toll. The second would be something that you mentioned, the ability to see yourself in a meeting or in a setting, really.

02:46–03:07

Angelica Finley: So in in-person settings, you're not experiencing looking at yourself unless you have a mirror with you a lot of the time. And in classes that I've taught, I might be the only one with my video on. So, it's almost like I'm speaking at myself for maybe an hour and a half. So that can really take a toll. And like you said, you're sort of just staring at your face and your imperfections.

03:07–03:31

Angelica Finley: We're all human. So everybody, I'm sure, has felt that way. I definitely have. The third, you're always expected to be on in a Zoom session or in a remote session. So with face to face interaction, you have the ability to look around the class, look away from the instructor, look down at your notes. In an online class, you really don't have that ability.

03:31–03:52

Angelica Finley: I mean, you definitely can look away from your screen, but you also don't want to look like you're not paying attention. You don't want to seem distracted. So it is very taxing to always feel like you need to be on and ready and that you're always being looked at. So in an in-person setting, you don't feel like your other classmates are sort of looking at you all of the time.

03:52–04:03

Angelica Finley: But when you're on Zoom, you have all the thumbnails showing you can kind of see what everybody's doing all the time. So it definitely can be a little bit stressful in that sense.

04:03–04:04

Amy Safirstein Sharma: Absolutely. That's a good point.

04:05–04:29

Angelica Finley: The fourth, I would say we've all have experienced this would be distractions and tech issues. So in an online setting or on Zoom, there is that temptation of being able to multitask when you're in a class, I would say, or just in a meeting, whether that be online shopping or checking your email or going on your social media, you do have that sort of ability to multitask.

04:30–04:53

Angelica Finley: That's a big thing. And tech issues and we've all have experienced our fair share of tech issues, whether that be Wi-Fi or lagging. There are zoom issues that could come up. A certain feature isn't working. Breakout groups aren't working. You're unable to share your screen. That can be a really big distraction that can just ultimately be a stressor for faculty that aren't expecting it, students who aren't expecting it.

04:53–05:05

Angelica Finley: And it can take a large sort of chunk of time to recover from that. To go off of that, what are some strategies that students can implement to manage their zoom fatigue?

05:05–05:27

Amy Safirstein Sharma: So one thing that we recommend is getting situated, looking, and making sure that you're centered, that everyone can see you and then turning off your own view of yourself and zooming so that you can see yourself the entire time. Definitely a hard thing to do initially because you want to just keep going back and making sure that your face looks as symmetrical as possible.

05:27–05:55

Amy Safirstein Sharma: But it's better in the long run to go ahead and turn that off so that you can't keep looking at yourself and nit picking what may or may not be wrong. Additionally, if you can move your seat back a little bit just to create a little bit of space between yourself and the screen that helps to kind of trick your brain into thinking that you're not super close up with everyone looking right at your face all of the time and

additionally having that extra space allows you to potentially move around a little bit more in non-distracting ways.

05:55–06:14

Amy Safirstein Sharma: One of the ways I actually found to help myself in one of my classes was I bought a cheap stationary bike and I just set it up underneath my desk and during class I would watch the class and just be slowly pedaling underneath the desk to kind of keep myself moving, which definitely helped me to pay a little bit more attention to class.

06:14–06:35

Amy Safirstein Sharma: And then finally, your professors are there for you. They want to help you succeed. So if you're really having issues this fatigue, I would recommend talking with your professor about it. They can come up with strategies and try to help you to be a little bit less fatigued, maybe change things around in their class a little bit. They may not realize the students are really getting fatigued through these Zoom sessions.

06:35–06:43

Amy Safirstein Sharma: So that being said, and how can professors best help their students either in class or when designing their courses to mitigate those effects of Zoom fatigue?

06:43–07:14

Angelica Finley: Sure. So one of the main things that I've learned is that every second doesn't need to be filled with talking. In-person classes aren't like that. Zoom classes do not need to be like that. So utilizing polls, breakout groups making room for questions or conversations even, that can be really helpful. So just engaging students in different ways other than just communicating on meeting themselves and communicating, utilizing the Zoom chat can be helpful as well.

07:14–07:38

Angelica Finley: I feel like a lot of my students really enjoy using the chat to engage with the class and ask questions rather than on YouTube themselves. So that is a big one. Utilizing applications such as Portal everywhere where you can integrate them in PowerPoints, integrate poll questions and PowerPoints, I should say, integrate word bubbles, things that just give a second for a break of just lecturing.

07:38–08:07

Angelica Finley: The most obvious solution here would probably be to take breaks, schedule a break if you can during a session. I know it depends on the meeting time, so if you have a 50 minute class, you don't really have the ability to take a break. You kind of need to get that content and material in there. But if you have a longer period that you're working with shorter breaks, a five minute break, that can be really helpful.

08:07–08:31

Angelica Finley: And also the last would be to schedule some video off time in your session. So if you want to put students in breakout groups for a class discussion to work on a certain in class activity, that's really helpful. They don't need to necessarily have their camera off. So or they don't necessarily need to have their camera on for or something like that.

08:31–08:53

Angelica Finley: It gives them a chance to sort of turn off rather than feeling like they're on all the time. So once you put students in a breakout session that gives them the ability to sort of turn off their camera and be able to just talk back and forth with each other, or if they have just in class work in general to work on their own, they can go ahead and turn their cameras off.