# City, University of London, 3rd Learning and Teaching Exchange,

# Turning the Tables: Listening, and Learning from a Student Perspective

May 2021 Online

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## Session title, Our Turn to Teach, Raqaiyah Javaid

The transcript contained in this document represents the written form of Raqaiyah Javaid’s presentation with suggestions to improve learning and teaching presented as part of City’s third annual Learning and Teaching Exchange – Turning the Tables. In this presentation, Raqaiyah, the SU’s VP of Education brushes upon recommendations regarding Online Teaching, Assessment and Feedback, Social and Community, as well as Welfare. She finishes the presentation with a brief Q&A session.

The recording from which this transcript originates, [Our Turn to Teach](https://mediaspace.city.ac.uk/media/Welcome%20by%20Professor%20Susannah%20Quinsee%20and%20Introduction%20-%20Our%20Turn%20to%20Teach%20by%20Raqaiyah%20Javaid%2C%203rd%20City%20Learning%20and%20Teaching%20Exchange%2C%2028th%20April%202021/1_2had8brt) can be accessed directly for an audio version.

## Speaker Description

Susannah: Susannah Quinsee [AVP Educational Development and Director at the Learning Enhancement and Development (LEaD) team]

Raqaiyah: Raqaiyah Javaid [VP Education - representing the Students’ Union (SU)]

Attendee

Moderator

# 1. Introductions [Begins at 0:00]

Susannah: [Cover slide of the event presentation is shown] [Begins at 0:00]

I'm Susannah Quinsee. I'm Assistant Vice- President Educational Development and Director of Learning Enhancement and Development. I'm going to be co-chairing this session with Raqaiyah Javaid who is our Vice- President Education from the SU. Just a warning that we are recording this session. Hester has just started the recording. So, and posted a message in the chat. Thank you very much, Hester can you share the next slide please?

Susannah: [First slide displays the event schedule] [Begins at 0.33]

I feel like I'm in one of those government briefings. Next slide, please. So we've got quite a busy schedule this afternoon. You will get a break, so don't worry. So first of all, it's just going to be a quick welcome from me and then I'm going to handover to Raqaiyah, then we've got, who's going to talk about various aspects of the student experience from a Student Union perspective. Then we've got two students from our Law school who are going to be talking about online learning and tips for teaching and their experiences. We'll then have a break. Then we're going to move on to thinking about online community support which has been really important. I know that's been quite a big issue for a lot of our staff and students about how to encourage community-building when we're all online or even when we're working in a more mixed fashion online and on-campus. We've then got a presentation on assessment. And lastly, we'll be looking at our digital insights survey. And then we're going to have a short closing panel at the end, really thinking about what we've heard this afternoon from the students and how we can use that for our planning in the future. So thank you very much for taking the time this afternoon, particularly to our students as well. I really, really appreciate it. And on that note, I'm going to handover to Raqaiyah.

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 1:52]

Thank you, Susannah. And good afternoon to everyone who's attending, really great to have you here and excited for you to hear from the student experience. So I am just going to screen share my presentation. And if everyone could just let me know when they are able to see it. (Cover slide of the presentation is visible on the screen)

Attendee: [Begins at 2:17]

Yes, can see that.

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 2:18]

Perfect, I will just make it a bit bigger. Is that visible?

Susannah: [Begins at 2:29]

That is visible now in presentation view so thank you.

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 2:33]

You're welcome. Okay, I'll just make a start then. So today, so as Susannah has already introduced me, I am Raqaiyah Javaid, I am the Vice-President Education at the Students Union. And for those of you who don't know too much about my role and what the Students Union do. My role as VP education is to sort of look at the academic and educational experience that students are having. Naturally, in an online context, that's been very varied, and so I've had quite a busy year and had learned a lot about what students are looking for and have enjoyed and sort of have suggestions for as well in terms of teaching for this year.

# 2. Start of presentation [Begins at 3:12]

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Online Teaching: What you can do. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 3:12]

So in terms of online learning, what we suggest for academics to sort of do and can learn from is first of all that students have reported to the Students’ Union that they feel like some of their staff have been struggling with things like internet issues, and with fully optimising all of the features of online platforms like Moodle, Team, Teams and Zoom. So we feel like the most useful thing for us to do is to start to signpost academics to these catch up and support sessions that LEaD will be running over the summer. And they've got loads of resources online that can support students, eh, staff who are struggling in this aspect.

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 3:48]

 For students, they have a similar resource available to them, which is called the student digital support community on MS Teams but for students whose courses use specific software like MATLAB or Apps Anywhere they have reported to us that they would value some more targeted support as what they have is currently helpful but the IT department have reported in their statistics that they're still having 65 percent more queries than usual or so we can see that there is sort of a little bit of a gap that needs to be filled in terms of students getting that digital support as well. So it'd be great to see academics where possible, trying to do that. We also ask for academics to encourage engagement with the student groups that are attending your sessions by pausing regularly when you're teaching or at points where it feels appropriate to do so, so that you can ask students if they have any questions. And also checking the chat box every 15 minutes or so, and using breakout rooms to encourage students to participate in your session to make sure that they are understanding every aspect of what you're teaching them.

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 4:48]

In terms of tutorials and seminars, we also recommend keeping class sizes small and regular where possible. So less than 15 students where possible as this is what students have expressed a preference for. Where applicable sessions should be interactive and encourage discussion between the students. And we want teaching to contain quizzes, polls and question and answer sessions as these are all good ways to facilitate interaction and discussion in an organic way. In terms of having your camera on, there are accessibility reasons as to why students might not do this. And so we want you to still encourage them to contribute and engage with their fellow students using alternative method, methods such as addressing them by name and in terms of group work, if this must be assigned, then we recommend using the first session to allow the students in the group to get to know each other and understand the project and try to be available and supportive for them throughout that process, just because it is a little bit more difficult in the online context.

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Online Teaching: What you can do part two. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 5:48]

We also ask for you to be mindful about how pre content, erm pre-recorded content in advance of synchronous teaching sort of contributes to the overall study hours for a module. So some students have been reporting that they're being assigned large amounts of pre-recorded content to listen to and having a lot of pre-reading. But in particular, sort of this over-reliance on pre-recorded content is something that's negative for facilitating interaction. So students also struggle when they're not given sufficient opportunity to ask questions about it. So we ask that you reserve the first 10 minutes of a synchronous teaching session for Q and A, or for answering questions as students have been saying that sometimes they do feel a little bit uncomfortable to ask questions about previous content if that means interrupting their scheduled teaching. We also talk about the fact that study plans or guides have been something that students have been suggesting, as well as integrating breaks at the end of a class or at the beginning. So what the students union have done is shortening our meetings so they finish at 10 past or starting at 10 past just to give that person a little bit of breathing time. And also empha, students have been emphasising that quality is more important than quantity when it comes to resources. And it would also be good to see academics utilising the features that Teams and Zoom often so things like breakout rooms, using the recordings and something that I discovered recently was that there is a transcription option which can help in terms of supporting students to take good notes.

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Online Teaching: What you can do part three. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 7:25]

 We also over the summer ask for schools to evaluate and also for the academics as well to be introspective and look at the ways that online teaching approaches have been used this year with the view of making improvements. We also want to see an increased number of hours being dedicated to non-assessed peer to peer learning opportunities. And we also feel that it's important to set expectations for students at the start of teaching in terms of online conduct, best practice, and schedules, as well as for schools to create resources outlining this so that this can be referenced to later on should issues arise. But also so that the student and the academic have a mutual understanding and to have reasonable expectations of each other. We've also found that students have really appreciated that when academics take the initiative to provide study aids on a permanent basis and in a timely manner over a variety of types of resources.

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Assessment and Feedback. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 8:23]

And next topic that I'd like to cover is assessment and feedback. So this is something that we asked students about as part of the student check-ins. And the most prominent issues were around poor feedback, lack of support, clustering exams, and the sense that online learning was harder than usual. They also expressed an overwhelming preference for 24 hour exams compared to time-limited exams. So it would be good to see this being implemented where possible. And also to avoid clustering deadlines. And this is something that requires better cohesive working between the academic/ departments. So especially for students who are on joint courses that span across the schools like Business and SMCSE, it can be difficult to know whose responsibility it is to manage a student's overall workload. But we have seen some students getting you know a lot of tests in one week because of those sort of miscommunications. So one student was reporting to us that they had 4 tests in 1 week, which was really difficult and not sort of conducive to them performing to their best standard.

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 9:26]

Another thing that has come up repeatedly is that students are requesting that no deadlines or exams are set during reading week. This is supposed to be a week that is reserved for students to catch up on reading and revise their content. And this request has specifically come, oh sorry, especially come from Law and SMCSE students who don't feel like they'd really gotten a break this academic year. And finally on this bit, on this slide, it really makes a difference to students when the revision plan is provided for them and as well as their exam and coursework and test dates being confirmed well in advance. So they really appreciate it where, when these dates are confirmed and academics make an effort not to change them where possible.

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Assessment and Feedback part two. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 10:10]

Also on assessment and feedback, the check-in showed that quality of feedback was an issue across all of the schools. That students have been reporting that they feel like they have been getting fewer comments, getting generalised feedback as opposed, as opposed to personalised feedback. And there have also been sort of long delays for grades. And these were all the things that students referenced as occurrences that seem to have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Students have been reporting that sometimes it does feel unfair that they feel like they're being expected to maintain standards in terms of exam performance. But it doesn't always feel like those standards are upheld in their feedback. So it's really important to have that parity in, in sort of how the expectations are set for students and then staff also adhering to sort of normal where that is expected from students. And where feedback is provided, it needs to be meaningful and comprehensive. So at Royal Holloway University, for example, they've got something like a minimum of a 100 words of feedback as part of their policy around assessment and feedback. But at City unfortunately, we've had instances where we've had academics justifying giving 1-3 words of feedback. Which as a student is something that's quite difficult to deal with and you know it doesn't feel like your academic has put in a lot of effort. So it is really good to sort of give feedback that is meaningful and comprehensive. And another thing that students have reported to us is that they really appreciate having feedback sessions after an exam. Even if that is in a group format, it's always better than nothing.

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Social and Community. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 11:47]

In terms of social and community, students have been reporting that course community is something that's really important to them. And in our student check-ins, course, community was what caused a sense of community for 37% of the students that we spoke to. However, there are many students who still do not feel a sense of community with 47% of the students that we spoke to as part of our student check-ins saying they did not feel any sense of community. And we found that this was particularly an issue for students with a disability. And the students who did feel a sense, of course community praised the interactive elements of online learning for creating community. Also things like quizzes, time, having time allocated for questions and group work were also things that helped with that. And a large proportion of the students that we spoke to have found that the course based chats were vital for getting to know other students. And this will also be important for whatever blended learning might look like next year. And we have included a quote from one of the students who we spoke to as part of the check-in calls who said the WhatsApp group, the WhatsApp groups lecturers are all very approachable and they put you in breakout rooms to help you network and interact. So those are all things that have had positive feedback in terms of creating that feeling of community and opportunities for socialising.

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Social and Community: What you can do. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 13:12]

So additional things that you can do to sort of foster that community feeling between the students is that although sort of academics aren't allowed to have too much in involvement in these processes, is still nice to encourage your students to make group chats and to add each other on social media. Just so that they have an opportunity to make friends because this is something that's lacking with not being able to visit campus. It's really nice to reserve a few minutes of each class at the beginning or the end to allow students to chat to each other and to you for socialising purposes. Also you can have a fun game or a quiz once a month for socialising. You can also double this up to be used for revision as well. And to ensure that your teaching style is interactive and you're constantly encouraging the students to collaborate, communicate, and connect as part of an academic community. And also try to take advantage of scheduling socials that can take place so just before the break. You can hold a social just before reading week or at the beginning or end of the term. And just making sure that you are fostering, allowing, sorry, allowing students to have that opportunity to interact with each other and make friends.

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Welfare. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 14:24]

And finally, in terms of welfare, as part of our student check-ins, 70% of the students that we spoke to said that they felt supported whilst at City, which was something that was really positive. However, 10% of the students that we spoke to did not feel supported. And we found that black students 10% more likely to feel less supported than other students. And when students did feel supported, they cited that it came from their course, their academic community and their learning environment. And 17% of students said that they had received poor, poor support from their course. So in the context of students saying that the course is the place where they feel that community is, is where they find it easier to make friends and, and feel supported, it's you know, it's significant that 17% of them are sort of saying that this isn't, is lacking for them. And so we've just included a quote that a student said, which was that one student said that they feel like they need more support from their personal tutor. That lecturers' response time should be quicker. One student said that they really appreciate their personal tutor and because they know that there is support from them if they need it.

Raqaiyah: [Next slide reads, Welfare: What you can do. It lists bullet points recommendations] [Begins at 15:40]

And so in terms of supporting students welfare, some of the things that you can do, are firstly emphasising an open-door approach. So for example, at the end of each session saying to the student, please email me if you have any questions or I'll be holding a Q&A every six weeks if you need additional support. In terms of personal tutoring, we've always gotten quite varied feedback. And it's important to, as a personal tutor, to ensure good rapport with students early on by being welcoming and meeting regularly with your students. And personal tutoring should provide a space for conversation about home life. So for example, if the student has parenting or carrying responsibilities, also safety. Erm so you know you can ask students about sort of their home situation. So unfortunately, some students are in quite difficult situations like domestic violence, bullying and harassment. And also we do have students who are, who are struggling financially. And these are all things that can be addressed and, and talked about in a personal tutoring session. Because quite often the personal tutor is the first person that the student will come to. And so it's really important that you are creating a space which facilitates those conversations take place and that the student feels comfortable to come to you with those things. And also as part of personal tutoring, always trying to signpost students to the relevant services. And so making sure that you're aware of those services. So for example, most students, most schools, sorry will have a welfare officer. that's a really good resource to signpost students towards if they are struggling in terms of their welfare needs. And also it's important to be honest with students regarding when there are busy times and when your replies to emails might be delayed. because often we have found that students you know can get quite upset when they don't get a response in good time. But more than often, more often than not, there is a reasonable excuse for an academic or a personal tutor or a welfare officer taking their time to reply. And you know it's just important to have that communication so that the student sort of understands the circumstances as to why those things might be happening. But yeah, that's the end of my presentation. I hope that was helpful and I can take any questions as part of the Q and A bit. [End of presentation]

# 3. Q&A Session [Begins at 17:59]

Susannah: [Begins at 17:59]

Thank you Raqaiyah, that was hugely helpful and really interesting. And I think you raised some, some really helpful points there about engaging students. And some of the things that we can do, some of them, some of them quite simple actually, to just really help students when they're studying online. Did we have any questions in the chat for Raqaiyah?

Moderator: [Begins at 18:19]

There's none just yet Susannah. Yeah. If anybody does have any questions, please do pop them in the chat or raise your hand. But I think one of the main kind of comments and feedback that's coming up is about the sense of community. And especially, yeah, this idea of getting community through support and regular feedback as well. So some really, really interesting points there, but I'm sure there's some questions that might come through.

Susannah: [Begins at 18:48]

Thank you. I think we'll pick, we'll probably pick up at that in our session right at the end. Oh we've got one question. Thank you. Martin, we'll take that and then we'll move on to the next presenter. Martin Rich has asked how can we improve clarity over what personal tutor roles are? Well, I know that there's some work happening about that, but I will ask, ask Raqaiyah if she's got any comments there.

Raqaiyah: [Begins at 19:10]

Yeah. I think it's a good question. I think it's something that will happen at a school level. Erm so you've got you know the senior personal tutors and it would be good for them to sort of really make sure that their, the, their sort of personal tutors that they're responsible for are, have, they have a clear understanding of what the role is. So it's about that sort of top-down approach and making sure that there's a clear communication and mutual understanding from everybody about what the personal tutoring role is. Erm and also there is, like Suzannah said, some, some work happening higher up at the University about, sort of the policies around personal tutoring. But also something that the students union are perhaps looking at is perhaps coming out with sort of a diagram or some guidance for students about what sort of, the roles of different people in the university are and who to go to for what. So you know if you have X problem, you go to your course officer for this, and then if you have Y problem, you go to your personal tutor for that. So we are trying to sort of tackle that problem from a student perspective as well so that students know that their personal tutors are there to support them with a variety of issues, not just academic, and so they can also be utilising that service more so than they are currently. So I hope that is helpful.

Susannah: [Begins at 20:28]

That's really helpful. Thank you. And I will post a link to the work that's happening under the education and student strategy priorities just at the moment about students support and making the role of the personal tutor clearer and linking into other support services as well. So thank you very much Raqaiyah, I'm going to pass back over to you to introduce the next session. It was a brilliant presentation. Thank you.

[End of presentation]