Teaching Highly Participatory Courses Using Adobe Connect

AGENDA

13H00 Welcome and Context
13H10 Key Learnings: What Worked, What Didn’t
14H00 Breakouts (TBD)
14h10 Q+A

Dr. Paul Saurette, Political Studies, uOttawa, August 10, 2020
Webinar Logistics

- Note: a recording of the webinar and this PPT document will be shared following the session. We may also circulate a FAQ based on Q+A.

- Unlike my classes, this webinar will be lecture-heavy, rather than participation-oriented. PPT is also very dense. Apologies! However, most efficient way to share results with live participants and those who watch the recording.

- Will have Q+A for the last part of the webinar. Will be largely text-based.
  - Q+A pod: Qs for presenters. We will monitor during lecture, respond in Q+A period.
  - Public Chat: informal comments, Qs (esp with fellow participants)
  - Private Chat: send private message to TLSS host (Nancy Vezina)
  - Raised hand: raise urgent issue/Q with presenter/host

- This webinar focuses primarily on ‘bigger picture’ questions about how to leverage strategies/tools in Adobe Connect. If you have more technical questions, put them in the Q+A pod, but we may respond after the session.
Basis of Material Presented

- **CAVEAT**: Synthesis of our experience in these two classes. **Not** grounded in, nor assessed against, scholarly literature on distance learning.

- Extensive real-time analysis and evaluation of courses (Prof/TAs debriefed + adapted after each class) + extensive end-of-course synthetic evaluation exercise = 25 page synthesis doc of key learnings.

- End-of-course student survey focused exclusively on their experience of the tools and strategies used (rather than on content/teaching quality). Survey was sent out after grades were officially submitted. 50%+ response rate in both classes.

- Discussions with TLSS and colleagues with distance learning experience.
**Context**


- POL3102 – 3rd year required course. Political Thought. 90 students Lecture format. 3hr class, 2x/week. 2 TAs. Most students taking multiple virtual classes.

- POL4142 – 4th year optional course. Applied Ethics. 50 students. Seminar format. 3hr class, 2x/week. 1 TA. Most students taking multiple virtual classes.

- ASSUMPTION = Keeping student focus and attention for full class would be major challenge, esp given COVID challenges.

- GOAL = reproduce highly participatory environment characteristic of the ‘in-person’ version of these classes to keep students engaged despite distance.

- FORMAT = synchronous distance learning (realtime lectures in scheduled class hours). Adobe Connect, Brightspace, Zoom.
Some Key Takeaways

- Adobe Connect distance course is no substitute for in-person learning. Students preferred in-person classes. Instructors preferred in-person classes.

- That said, students both performed very well in the distance-learning version, and reported high levels of satisfaction with the environment (taking into account the exceptional COVID context).

- It is possible to create a highly-participatory environment even in a large distance-learning lecture course. In some ways offers more opportunities for participation, although quality of participation overall isn’t necessarily higher.

- It takes a **SIGNIFICANT** amount of extra work to learn the tools and redesign the course for the virtual environment, and MUCH more energy to run them. On the other hand, you will definitely learn new skills and techniques!
Some Key Takeaways (Cont)

- AC is NOT a video-conferencing tool. It is a webinar broadcast tool. Great for large and/or lecture format courses. For seminar format with < 30 students, I would likely use video-conferencing platform next time.

- Large percentage of students facing genuinely difficult COVID-influenced challenges that significant impact their studies. Important to keep this front of mind when designing/running courses.

- Expect that various things you plan on doing won’t work and that you will need to tweak your course throughout the session. Plan on it and explain that likelihood to students upfront.

- Everything takes longer + requires far more explicit and clear communication. Do what you can to streamline and optimize the structure of your course. Assume you will likely be able to do 75% max of what you would normally do.
Overview of tools/strategies

LECTURES (Prof):
- AV
- Notes
- Polls
- Chat
- Q+A
- Shared PPT/PDFs
- Shared Screen (URL)

LECTURES (Students)
- Chat
- Q+A
- Polls
- Raised Hands
- AV (ltd)

BREAKOUTS (Students):
- Chat (shareable)
- Notes (shareable)

VOLUNTARY DGDs
- Zoom

OFFICE HOURS
- Zoom
- GoogleSheet sign up

ACCOMMODATIONS
- GoogleSheet

COMMUNICATIONS
- Syllabus
- Brightspace
  - Announcements
- Email (w triage system)

EVALUATIONS
- Gradebook (bspace) +
  - googlesheets
- Rubrics (bspace)
- Attendance polls (AC)
- Self-evaluation quizzes
  - (participation + written assignments)
- Instructor observation
  - (participation)
COVID Challenges Faced By Students

Challenges in Spring 2020 (%)

- COVID related health issues (self or immediate family)
- Mental health
- Tech (ltd connectivity/bandwidth, old/slow hardware)
- Motivation
- Concentration/distraction
- No dedicated work space
- Had to move just before/during semester
- Lost work/financial concerns (self and family)
- Family stress
- Lack of personal contact with friends, peers, instructors
- Added complexity of achieving normal everyday tasks took away from time for studies
Overall Format Preference

Student Format Preference (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>In Person</th>
<th>On-line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POL3102</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL4142</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments: In Person Preference**
- Much easier to concentrate
- More productive, more conducive to in-depth learning
- Allows for better separation between work and life – better balance
- Easier to concentrate, fewer distractions
- Personal contact with peers/instructors
- More stimulating, more fluid discussions
- Better, more learning-focused ‘mindset’

**Comments: On-Line Preference**
- Convenience – save transport $ and time
- Easier to participate (eso for students who don’t feel comfortable with public speaking)
Participation: Opportunity + Quality

Opportunities to Participate (%)

- POL3102: 70 (More), 22 (Same), 8 (Fewer)
- POL4142: 60 (More), 35 (Same), 5 (Fewer)

Quality of Participation (%)

- POL3102: 65 (Better), 13 (Same), 22 (Worse)
- POL4142: 55 (Better), 30 (Same), 15 (Worse)
Adobe Connect Overall: Students

Typical +ve Comments
- Easy to follow lectures
- Breakouts were excellent – even in ‘chat’ format
- Participation tools (chat, Q&A, polls) were both easy to use and highly engaging
- Was nice to have a live class – made it feel like I was still in university
- Much more orderly and easy to focus compared to zoom/video conferencing
- AV good for student presentations, but nice to not have to stream own video feed all the time

Typical –ve Comments
- A little dry compared to seeing everyone on zoom
- Chat during lecture could be distracting, sometimes too much going on to focus properly
### Adobe Connect Overall: Instructors

**Positives**

- Webinar format very good for large lecture courses
- Offers many tools that facilitate high student participation
- Participation tools are easy to use, internally coherent, content can be downloaded/reviewed later
- Instructors control participant view — helps manage focus + avoid information overload (eg open/close chat, etc)
- Highly customizable environment
- Instructors can prep/upload classroom and materials before class
- Easy to have guest lecturers join; give students ‘presenter’ rights

**Negatives/Considerations**

- Time/energy to learn, customize classroom environments
- Windows 97 feel UI
- Clunky with PPT – esp .pptx file (need to upload as .ppt) Sometimes better to upload as PDF
- No internal pod to share websites (must share screen)
- Easy to try to do too much/have too much information on screen. Planning for attention management/overload = key
- Not ideal if you want continuous AV for all students
- Optimized for computer. OK on iPad. Very poor on phone
Class Lectures

Instructor Comments
- Simple, straightforward and effective platform for lecturing
- AV worked well
- Fairly easy to share docs/ websites/ etc
- Can set up classroom before class = real advantage
- Easy to use tools to engage students and drive participation during lectures
- Ability to control and universalize participant view helps ensure focus
- Had assumed Whiteboard tool would be useful. It wasn’t.

Typical Student Comments
- Easy to follow the lectures
- Prof AV worked well, limited tech glitches
- Chat/Q+A/Raised hands = allowed interaction even during lectures
- Visual of prof only helped focus
- Sometimes ‘too much’ going on with chat, etc as well as lecture
INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS
• Critical tool for ensuring active participation – both during breakouts and for setting atmosphere for class lectures
• Helped students integrate content from their own perspective
• Reset attention and focus
• Definitely need explicit discussion/education re norms of breakout discussion (active inclusivity, reflection vs reaction, manage pace/volume, etc)
• Breakouts = text based (chat/notes) as AC couldn’t handle AV. Worked very well.
• Instructors did not monitor breakouts

STUDENT COMMENTS
• Appreciated change of learning style
• Liked ability to actively discuss questions at length
• Not quite like in-person groups, but still allowed real connection with peers (even with discussions entirely text based)
• Discussions generally very respectful, even better after explicit guidance
**Participation: Chat (Students)**

*Chat – Lectures (%)*

- **POL3102**:
  - Good: 49
  - Neutral: 34
  - Poor: 17

- **POL4142**:
  - Good: 75
  - Neutral: 20
  - Poor: 5

*Chat – Breakouts (%)*

- **POL3102**:
  - Good: 61
  - Neutral: 3
  - Poor: 0

- **POL4142**:
  - Good: 75
  - Neutral: 30
  - Poor: 25
**Participation: Chat (Instructors)**

**Positives**
- Allowed/motivated extremely high level of participation from much wider cross section than possible with in-person class
- Allowed students to discuss material in real time during lecture without interrupting flow
- Allows virtually the entire class to immediately respond to questions instructor poses to class mid-lecture
- Chat history (full class + breakouts) can be downloaded, allowing for evaluation
- Helped build rapport between prof and students despite digital distance
- Private chat function also exists – allows students to privately communicate with prof/TAs as well as communicate with their peers. Both were surprisingly useful

**Negatives/Considerations**
- Requires thoughtful and active monitoring and mentoring to maximize utility
- Chat has some aspects of ‘Twitter effect’: Reaction > Reflection; Volume and pace of chat can be overwhelming; can be distracting from lecture/discussion; some students are less sensitive in phrasing their comments than in person; easy to misinterpret
- Explicitly outlining and educating students re ‘norms’ of chat is essential – esp re inclusivity, sensitive topics, etc
- Need to have someone (other than the lecturer) monitoring and engaging with chat
- Need to be thoughtful about when to use chat pod and when to hide it (focus mgmt). Works best when used selectively.
INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS
• Simple, straightforward and effective tool to collect and respond to questions
• Qs posed privately to instructors; instructors can respond to indiv or whole class, can respond after class and make available for next class
• Ensures Qs aren’t lost, as they often are in pace/volume of chat
• Very effective way to manage both content and logistical questions. We used it both in class, and 15 mins before/after
• Takes discipline/effort to use, but worth it
• Worth scheduling time in a lecture to focus solely on responding to Q+A pod

STUDENT COMMENTS
• “Liked seeing what they were thinking”
• “Made me realize how smart my peers are. Inspired me big time”
• Allowed me to ask my question without worrying that the chat would bypass me
• Allowed for deeper, more interesting Qs
• Crucial tool for clarifying logistical issues
PARTICIPATION: POLLS

INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS

- Fantastic tool – used 8+ times per class
- Polls were very useful for a variety of functions: attendance throughout class; check logistics (e.g., who read the announcement/syllabus/etc., who needs more explanation of assignment X); icebreakers; content clarification (who needs more explanation of concept Y); kick off discussions (e.g., which of the following words best describes politics for you)
- Re-energized the class in the middle of a lecture
- Really drove student participation – students loved seeing aggregate results and wanted to respond.
- Excellent way to get an overall feel for students’ understanding/view on content questions, and for kicking off follow-up substantive discussions

STUDENT COMMENTS

- Great way to get pulse of class
- A high point of the class
- Promoted democratic practices
- Encouraged participation
- Broke up long lectures
- Fun and light way to stay engaged. Drove participation.
INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS
- Raised hand (and other) icons were useful in variety of ways on their own. Checkmarks/Xs allow for quick temperature checks. Raised hands good ways to identify comments, even if you ask them to put comments in chat rather than do AV
- Given logistics of platform, giving students AV adds 1 min + of logistics per Q/comment. Adds up fast.
- Student bandwidth/connectivity also often an issue
- As such, we used student AV very sparingly – audio after breakouts, video if they wanted
- Overall conclusion = AC much better at text based participation than full AV. If you want full AV, Zoom/Teams better.

STUDENT COMMENTS
- Enjoyed other students present
- Allowed those of us who really wanted to speak to do so
- There should be a ‘thumbs up’ icon
- Worked better as audio only
- Connectivity issues limited my ability to use this
- Reproduced ‘in-class’ experience
PARTICIPATION: NOTES (STUDENTS)

Notes – Lectures (%)

- POL3102: 73 Good, 27 Neutral, 0 Poor
- POL4142: 85 Good, 15 Neutral, 0 Poor

Notes – Breakouts (%)

- POL3102: 68 Good, 27 Neutral, 5 Poor
- POL4142: 85 Good, 15 Neutral, 0 Poor
Participation: Notes (Instructors)

Positives
- Basically used as if it was a blackboard
- Originally assumed we’d use AC’s ‘Whiteboard’ function, but it lagged significantly (both for instructors and especially when multiple students trying to use in groups)
- Great for agenda/structure, setting up questions for breakouts, synthesizing in real time. More flexible than ppt
- Students found it very clear and accessible in both lectures and breakouts
- Breakout notes can be shared with full class – very effective way of debriefing group answers after breakout session
- Breakout notes can be downloaded by instructors – allowing them to be evaluated for participation
- Also used a notes pod in the ‘presenters only’ section of AC – allowed us to jot down issues to discuss post-class; mark student presentations; etc. Very useful.

Considerations
- In breakouts, good to have one student nominated as the ‘pen’ who tries to synthesize what the group comes up with, as well as a ‘presenter’ who will present the material back to the full class
- Text only – can’t draw, etc like a whiteboard/blackboard
**Student Participation: Voluntary DGs**

**Instructor Comments**
- Virtual environment makes adding Discussion Groups much easier.
- Added voluntary DGs to ensure that students had additional opportunities to go deeper into material.
- Voluntary because scheduled outside regular class hours.
- Held on Zoom, ~25 students per session.
- 1.5 hr sessions led by TAs, students created the agenda with their Qs.
- Both TAs and students found DGs very productive – great content discussions.

**Student Comments**
- Great way to go back over content – solidified my understanding of the material.
- I made a lot of friends through the DGs.
- Nice to get to know the TAs and prof.
- TAs did great job guiding discussion.
INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS

- Had used Brightspace gradebook and electronic assignment submission/feedback very sparingly in past.
- Brightspace evaluation options have various limitations.
- However, in distance-learning context (particularly with TAs and need to coordinate virtually), Brightspace tools proved invaluable.
- Gradebook, if correctly set up, simplifies keeping track of marks enormously. Googlesheet as backup.
- Creating rubrics to evaluate and give feedback on written work is a huge time saver, allows profs to easily look over and revise TA marking/feedback before releasing to students; students get mark + feedback immediately; automatically uploads mark to gradebook.
- Students generally found rubrics to be very helpful.
- Can make very detailed rubrics with significant feedback built in, but significant learning curve.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>A++</th>
<th>A+</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A-</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C/C+</th>
<th>D/D+</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Criterion Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of Marks</td>
<td>100 points</td>
<td>This is a truly unique synthesis – offering a depth, breadth and quality of insight that makes it within the top 1% of syntheses.</td>
<td>90 points</td>
<td>This synthesis is exceptional; it goes far beyond what is expected, both in terms of insight and depth. Truly outstanding work.</td>
<td>85 points</td>
<td>This synthesis is excellent; it persuasively identifies the main questions, theses, concepts and evidence; insightfully comments on/evaluates a variety of interesting themes, strengths, weaknesses, applications, comparisons to other thinkers, etc. and offers several outstanding questions for discussion.</td>
<td>80 points</td>
<td>This is a very good synthesis; it identifies a number of the main questions, theses, concepts and evidence; thoughtfully comments on/evaluates multiple interesting themes, strengths, weaknesses, applications, comparisons to other thinkers, etc. and offers several very strong questions for discussion.</td>
<td>75 points</td>
<td>This is a very strong synthesis; it identifies several key questions, theses, concepts and evidence; thoughtfully comments on/evaluates several interesting themes, strengths, weaknesses, applications, comparisons to other thinkers, etc. and offers several strong questions for discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Comments on How to Improve Synthesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offer more synthesis and less description. Focus less on the details, more on overall big picture the author is trying to outline.</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Criterion Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>Recommended</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identification of main questions and theses could be improved.

| 0 points | Recommended | 0 points | Not Applicable |

Outline of main concepts and arguments could have been improved.

| 0 points | Recommended | 0 points | Not Applicable |

Discussion of supporting evidence and reasoning could be stronger.

| 0 points | Recommended | 0 points | Not Applicable |

More critical evaluation and questions required.

| 0 points | Recommended | 0 points | Not Applicable |

More comparison with previous thinkers would improve the synthesis.

| 0 points | Recommended | 0 points | Not Applicable |

Structure and overall writing style could be improved.

| 0 points | Recommended | 0 points | Not Applicable |
### Example Rubric (cont)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback on 'Form'</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
<th>Criterion Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potential Feedback 1: You could increase the frequency/consistency of your journaling.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Feedback 2: You could increase the length/depth of your journal entries.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Feedback 3: You could condense/shorten your journal entries.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential Feedback 4: You could break your entries up into smaller chunks and focus each more on one central idea.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential Feedback 5: You could improve the clarity of the structure and writing style.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback on 'Content': You might want to try some of these...</th>
<th>Already doing well - keep doing!</th>
<th>Consider...</th>
<th>Criterion Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing a few thematic/questions/applications across authors.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepening your reflection about the readings and think about some of the additional, less obvious, questions/issues/implications raised by their arguments.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about the readings more from the big picture view, rather than the details (ask yourself, how would you encapsulate the readings to your parents/siblings/friends over dinner, and what questions/issues would they be interested in then discussing?)</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on one or two interesting details from a given reading, and then build up to and explore the broader questions/implications that would emerge from this.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the types of evidence a reading provides (or fails to provide). Or whether your knowledge of other facts/your own experience offers corroborating or contesting evidence.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying the ideas and arguments of the readings to contemporary events/issues (not just in politics, but to society more broadly) and consider what they imply.</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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**Evaluation: Self-Evaluations**

**Instructor Comments**

- Used self-evaluation quizzes for participation and written assignments.
- Participation self-eval used as one data point for overall participation grade + give immediate feedback to students with unrealistic self-evaluations.
- Written assignment self-eval used primarily to identify ‘challenges’ students faced and expectation calibration issues so instructors could follow up
- Very useful. Helped us address expectation gaps with specific students. Helped us reach out to specific students when they indicated they had faced significant external challenges that impacted their work.
- In general, students under-estimated quality of their participation and written assignments, esp at first
- Overestimators ~15% of class, Underestimators ~50%
COMMUNICATIONS

INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS

- Communications even more challenging in on-line environment. Takes far more time and effort than normal.
- Students ‘tune out’ and miss crucial info. Must over-communicate: repeat, repeat, repeat. Esp logistics.
- Also need to be far more explicit and detailed in communications. Remember, many students literally won’t know how to use the ‘doorknob’ to get into class.
- Syllabus was 2x as long as usual (~30 pgs) given need to explain many elements we would take for granted in person.
- Brightspace announcements = very effective. Students were responsible for all info shared via announcements.
- Email was preferred method of contact by students – very high volume. Had TA as first point of contact, then used triage system to consult me when necessary. 70% effective.
- High volume of accommodation requests. Overwhelming. Created spreadsheet and system to keep track.
COMMUNICATIONS: SET THE ETHOS

INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS

- Unusually high level of stress among students, TAs and instructors given COVID. Likely to peak again in fall term.
- Almost certain that you will need to adapt and revise the course as the term progresses (given changing context, learnings about how online environment is working for your class, etc)
- Everything works better, and can be more flexible, if both instructors and students explicitly acknowledge this; plan for this; and commit to adopting an appropriate attitude/mindset that reminds us that we are studying/ teaching in challenging times and should make certain accommodations for that...

4 Es
- Extrapolate
- Experiment
- Evaluate
- Evolve

Mindset
- Patience
- Perspective
- Curiosity
- Generosity
- Focus on the +ve
- Productive feedback

Class Ethos (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Unhelpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POL3102</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL4142</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Helpful: 80%
- Neutral: 20%
- Unhelpful: 8%
Last Thoughts

Was it worth the effort to create a high-participation online class environment?
- Absolutely. Students embraced participation opportunities far more than we expected.
- Student learning outcomes were far far superior to what we anticipated.
- Student appreciation of it was humbling: many said being able to participate so fully in class made them feel like they were still ‘in’ school with their instructors and peers.

Would I use Adobe Connect to teach again?
- Definitely for large lecture course. Probably not for small seminar course.
- I might also experiment with the format. E.g. Each week = 1 recorded lecture/podcast posted to Brightspace + 1 live lecture on Adobe Connect + 1 voluntary virtual DGD on zoom (might preserve significant participation opportunities + allow more flexibility for students’ schedules + reduce screen fatigue for both instructors and students).

Should you record and share your lectures?
- Decide if you will record/post your classes before term starts. Pros/cons to both.
- If you do record and post, learn the back-end AC system before term starts (it’s a bit counter-intuitive) + create system to remind you to record (surprising how easy it is to forget to hit ‘record’ in midst of starting a lecture + checking everything else).
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Q+A

- Please type in your questions to the Q+A pod if you would like the presenters to discuss.
- Please use the chat function to discuss with the whole group and/or comment on any of the material.

Dr. Paul Saurette, Political Studies, uOttawa, August 10, 2020