



**Tips & Takeaways from Think College Virtual Support Group:  
*Social Engagement*  
Friday, April 10, 2020**

**Staying Socially Connected and Having Fun**

**Connect whenever possible with the entire university community**

- We called on Best Buddies, since they are already intertwined with our students.
- Share whole university notifications, for example one university offered Instagram live exercise classes, every day.
- A Community College shared that their college had a webpage of activities like virtual museum tours, comedy nights, and more for all students.
- Other ideas: painting activities, something like “Sips & Strokes” (wine night while painting). Also fitness classes. Some students are resistant to attend, so suggesting events they can try, and supporting them to attend is important.
- University is offering CPR—encouraging students to participate

The sudden shift to online/distance learning has been a challenge but with **many unexpected benefits**, like the students had to learn fast and they are! They are becoming very experienced with the Google platform and tools like Zoom which will be great for future work experience.

**Create a virtual activity calendar for a month**, with links to join activities, like guided drawing on Sundays and playing Pictionary on Thursday.

**Use Zoom/WebEx/Google Meet/Hangouts for fun.** For example, someone hosted a dance party, they took song requests in advance on a Google doc, and the DJ played the list of songs. We want to mirror activities and patterns of engagement that happen anyway, and we want these activities to be sustainable. Former students and mentors are also invited to participate, not just current students and mentors. Hold Zoom lunches on Wednesdays, and something fun on Friday like scavenger hunts, dances, and Pictionary.

**Set up a (private) Facebook group for students.** They’re inviting friends who don’t have disabilities, and vice versa. One of our peer mentors is in a sorority and invited students in the program to attend a yoga class, or using FB Live to make dinners together. The peer mentor connection is important to encourage inclusive experiences during this

time. Parents aren't able to join, the events are for students only. We monitor, but don't really participate.

**Turned one of our biweekly meetings into a social, with students planning and running the event.** One student came up with some prompts to get things going, but after some time those weren't necessary. Gives students a more informal way to connect.

Students could **meet up virtually with students from another program.** Auburn and Mississippi State are doing E-pals, with students emailing each other like pen pals, and doing a Zoom meeting at the end of the semester so everyone can meet. Like a virtual student exchange!

### **Apps/Tools for Connecting**

**Flipgrid:** You make a video and "flip" it to your student then they can respond and flip it back. Nice tool to use with potential students, allows for a more authentic view of students. You can download all the videos and make one big video—Texas A&M is using it to thank their employers. This kind of tool is super helpful for students with limited writing or reading skills.

**Group Meet:** (or could use similar tool) Emphasizing some unstructured meetings, with no agenda. Like a watercooler check-in. What movies have you seen? Tried any new recipes? Go grab a hat and take a picture of yourself in the hat. Funny/silly things to keep it light.

**Houseparty:** You can play games with other people, they just have to join your party. There's trivia, people can guess what you're drawing. There's a head's up game. Watch your settings though, and notifications, because people can see when you're online and they can wave at you and send messages. It's nice because you can have just a quick interaction with people, say hi, quick check in and then leave. If you want to enter a private chat room, you can. It's like walking through a hall on campus, or into the dining hall.