

Procedure for Zoom Classes

History 2080; HLS Seminar in English Legal History

Spring, 2021

We learned some things about Zoom classes in the last semester and a half. They have some advantages: (1) One-on-one dialogue probably works better in Zoom than it does in a large classroom. (2) It's easier to break down into smaller groups and then come back together than it is in classrooms (not relevant for this class). (3) Side conversations, polling, and hand-raising are easier than they are in a classroom. There are also some decided disadvantages: (1) Lectures do not work well in Zoom. (2) Students (and even the instructor) get tired faster in Zoom, and the technology makes it easier for the students to 'tune out'. (3) Even when students are not tired, it's a lot easier to be passive in a Zoom class than it is in an in-person class.

With these points in mind, I have adopted some simple procedures to maximize the advantages of Zoom and minimize its disadvantages.

(1) There will be no lectures (inappropriate for a seminar anyway).

(2) But if the classes are going to be devoted to discussion, we need to have something to discuss. So I'm asking you to post something on the Discussion Board on the FAS site for the course in Canvas (<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/82534>)¹ before the class (before noon on the day of the evening class). What should you post? Anything, it need not be long. Something that interested you. Something that puzzled you. Something that you would like to hear more about in the class. A couple of sentences is fine. Don't go over a paragraph or two. The Discussion Board is organized by classes and the topics that are, as of now, scheduled for the class.

(3) With a group as small as this one is likely to be, we may be able to preserve some of the spontaneity of sitting around a seminar table. At least to start off with, let's see if we can avoid using chat, or even the raise hand function. If you want to say something, raise your hand physically or just unmute yourself and say it.

(4) Anonymity is a real problem when we were trying to create an interactive group at a distance. For this reason I am asking that you keep your video on during class. If you don't want people to see your messy room, put a background picture behind you or use a screen. (I use a green screen in the background of my Zoom; my office at home is even messier than the one at the Law School.) For the same reason, I am asking you to sign into Zoom with something that resembles your official name. 'Charlie Donahue' is fine. 'Charlie' all by itself is not, at least not start off with.

(5) I taught a seminar-like offering last semester, and found that taking a ten-minute break in the middle of the class helped. I'll do that in this seminar. Technically, if I do that, I'm supposed to run the class until 7:10. I'm not going to insist if you promise not to report me to the Feds if I don't.

Zoom Code of Conduct

1. All participants are expected to be on mute when not speaking.
2. To the degree that it is possible, all participants are expected to have their videos on.
3. Use of chat to all participants is allowed. Please no private chat, other than to the instructor.

¹ Why the FAS site? Because I need to get permission from the HLS Dean to allow someone who is not registered in the course in the Law School to access a Harvard Law School Canvas site. In the FAS Canvas site, I can simply list the law students as auditors.