Context: The following is used in online graduate level Public Administration courses (Leadership Ethics and Organization Theory). The document details the expectations for students' contributions during synchronous sessions using the tools of the online classroom. The document was authored by Richard M. Jacobs, OSA, Ph.D. in the department of Public Administration. Questions about the document can be directed to Stefan A. Perun, Ph.D. in the department of Public Administration, stefan.perun@villanova.edu.

After receiving one or two grades for class participation in the virtual classes, some students begin to wonder how they might improve their class participation grade.

The first thing that students should do is to read the Discussion Board post "Improving Class Participation." That post provides specific information about what class participation *is* and *is not*.

That said, some students---especially those who are new to the online learning experience---the virtual class session at first to be a bit disconcerting. For example, one student wrote in an email:

> "With that said, I didn't want to miss what you were saying and I found myself just focusing on you and responding to what questions you may have asked or statements made. I am not complaining or presenting you with excuses (I hope it is not coming off that way), I am just asking for clarity as to what is expected, aside from what you have posted on the discussion boards. Based on my class participation this Sunday, what needs to be improved...."

This student has raised an interesting point, namely, that online courses are different in many ways from traditional courses in classrooms. One of those ways is the chat box and its use/abuse.

First: the chat box is a subsidiary way to participate in online classes. It can be used effectively to communicate and comment on ideas raised/being discussed/passed over, communicate one's experience (for example, the emoticons---too fast, too slow), make connections not otherwise noted, situate the discussion in the materials read/videos watched. When the chat box is used to engage in ancillary conversations, that is definitely *not* class participation.

That said, "younger students" tend to be far more facile at "multitasking" than are "older students" who don't have as much experience with using multiple media simultaneously. The former seem to be able to listen and to write comments easily (for the most part). That said, much of what they oftentimes post isn't so much class participation, as that is defined on the Discussion Board post, as it is "talking during class." It takes those students awhile to "get it," but most eventually do, if only because their class participation grade is low and negatively impacting their overall grade.

Second: it seems that the more familiar a student is with the video content that is supposed to be viewed prior to the class (the UA study guide is very helpful here), the easier it is for the student to listen to the virtual class and follow the chat box simultaneously. Following the commentary in the chat box as well as the actual comments made in class, for example, it is pretty easy to note students who have *not* viewed the videos beforehand. These students quickly discover their class participation grade is very low, meaning as noted on the Discussion Board post, "present and breathing." Since adult learning theory is premised on the notion that students have a personal motive to study, any failure to come prepared to class "hurts" class participation tremendously.

One effective way to use the chat board for class participation is to correct erroneous statements made in the chat by locating the correct information in the course texts, videos, and the like. Yes, this is akin to "calling out" a fellow student; but, the collectivity suffers when a student is ill-prepared for class and presents oneself as well-prepared for class. We've all participated in meetings like this. In general, the online classroom experience is only as good as every student is well-prepared.

The biggest "transition" students experience in online classes involves moving from a singular focus to a multiple focus. Success in this endeavor requires attending to the chat box and the white board (with the PPTs) simultaneously.