

Online Teaching at the SnoKing Beekeepers Association rvsd 211107eo

As a member club that is less than 3 years old, we at SnoKing Beekeepers owe our rapid growth to “going online” almost from our beginning. The meeting restrictions of 2020 & 2021 kept us from ever fully adopting the traditional mold of beekeeping meetings, so we did not experience internal resistance in the shift to online. From the first restriction, we drew members more flexible and more familiar with technology than would usually be available to us. We look forward to large group in-person or hybrid zoom meetings in the future as much as any beekeeping club. However, our club success is largely due to our lack of definition as a newly emerging club in 2020.

How going online worked for any individual club depended on the mission of the club. The social monthly gathering that is really the *raison d’être* of so many beekeeper clubs, was not part of our club history. Our educational, sharing & networking format attracts members who prefer online meetings, for a large range of personal and lifestyle reasons. Past practices did not hinder our response to beekeeper needs, many of which were insufficiently met before the pandemic: website accessibility, Facebook discussion groups, meeting and class recordings, opportunities to share and network, etc. For networking and sharing opportunities, the Chat feature has been unexpectedly useful at zoom meetings. Breakout sessions we have not tried.

Going online particularly for the classes we offer has altered the makeup of our club membership, and brought us members from a wider region although we focus on beekeeping west of the Cascades. Beekeepers appear to have usually only joined one WASBA member club before meeting restrictions; we suspect that the average post-2019 beekeeper will belong to more clubs on average than before those restrictions. We see this as a positive trend of Washington State beekeepers towards asking information, advice, networking and support from local sources, sources inside Washington State. As often as possible, we recommend students take classes from their nearest bee club, although we welcome them taking ours as well. However, many clubs offered few classes, even fewer under Covid restrictions.

We have offered over a hundred students hundreds of hours of class instruction and issued dozens of certificates, the silver lining in a crisis situation. For better or for worse, everything online is subject to being recorded. So, we record meeting and class presentations but usually not the discussion and sharing that follow. We cover the manual materials with a generous amount of presentation time: 10.5 hours each for Beginner or Apprentice and 15 hours for Journeyman. Each class session starts with a 90-minute PowerPoint presentation followed by unlimited time for questions, discussion, sharing and networking. Unlisted recording of each class on the SKBA YouTube channel is available for anyone who missed class. The unlisted link is emailed with a reminder to take the quiz for the class completed. Because class email lists are generated by the online application process, making it that much easier to send the class reminders and any attachments or suggested URLs or other resources related to the chapters being covered each week.

Going online has also helped beekeepers by encouraging active development of the Facebook discussion groups limited to localities inside Washington State. Without that networking and support, the novice beekeeper turns naturally to the plethora of internet information sources, most of them not relevant and often detrimental to their Washington beekeeping experience. When teaching Beginner classes in Western Washington, what instructor has not had to “unexplain” making 2-frame splits and raising local queens in February, procedures the internet explains as “easy”?

Also, online testing is awesome! Testmoz offers a simple format allowing timing, allowing or limiting retakes, and each chapter score can be recorded and downloaded per student or per test version as .csv files. Remember, an individual score for each chapter is necessary to properly fill out the progress form required for each student. All tests for a class and even all class tests can be accessed via single test link. Any test can be opened or closed to students until they are ready to take it.

To summarize, in the last 2 years, we have offered classes at all 3 levels – Beginner, Apprentice, Journeyman, including the first online Journeyman academic course. Advantages of online include streamlining the paperwork burden of processing applications & payment, creating class email lists, testing, and requesting WASBA certificates at the end of the course. Those critical types of information are transmitted in a universal form (.csv files), saving time and effort. This smooth data transfer facilitates updating of class rosters, membership rosters, etc. making all our volunteer efforts more efficient – and making our volunteers happier! Not only did Covid change the way we meet and teach, we also were pushed to develop a YouTube, Facebook and web presence faster than we might otherwise.

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