

BEST PRACTICES FOR VIRTUAL TEACHING

The top priority is course pedagogy and organization of content. By now, you've already determined the content, the delivery mode, and the way you will assess students. But how will you encourage buy-in and participation from students when you can't see them face-to-face?

At first thought, many instructors think that having students run their video cameras to be "seen" is the best way to encourage participation. In reality, this "monitoring" of students actually increases the chance that both you and the students will experience tech issues during your class time and it does nothing to acknowledge content comprehension.

INCREASE LEARNER ENGAGEMENT BY:

1. Allowing students to identify questions or difficulty with the content.
2. Use polls, chats, and reactions to "read the room."
3. Invite specific students to contribute either a question or observation ("cold call").
4. Put students into breakout groups to engage with the content and discuss.
5. Use collaboration tools, such as OneNote, Wikis, or Google Docs.

The switch to virtual delivery mode created more questions than answers, initially. However, in technology using less is sometimes best.

SET CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS:

1. Ask students to mute themselves and mute their video unless they are speaking.
2. For best audio quality, use a headset with microphone.
3. Close software, programs, or browser tabs that you don't need to have running before joining the course session.
4. Familiarize yourself with a handful of features on a couple tools and practice getting better at those tools. You will often find there is not a need to add additional tools when you can use a handful of features of Blackboard, Collaborate, Teams, or Zoom to accomplish the effective delivery of content.
5. Recognize that while traditional students now are digital natives, some students do not have access to the best internet service providers, equipment, or knowledge of the technology you're using. Being organized and employing some of these best practices will help students pick up the technology quickly.

FIND WAYS TO SPEND YOUR TIME AS EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE:

The most efficient use of your time depends on your content. Lecture-oriented, case-based, group, labs, all of these courses have different considerations.

LECTURING:

- Long lectures do not work well in a virtual learning space.
- Break your lectures and PPTs into smaller sections to appeal to shorter attention spans, which is common for all virtual learners. *This will also decrease the file sizes and the likelihood that students will interact with the content.*
- Pre-record as many mini-lectures as you can, and provide them in modules in chronological order with content in Blackboard (3-5 min. segments).
- Intersperse reflection questions, quizzes, or other interactive elements between into the modules to allow students time to digest and consider what they've learned and keep them engaged with content.

- Insert yourself into the conversation as a real person by interjecting commentary with personal experience, humorous or editorial commentary from your field or previous work experience.
- Students can complete modules, readings, videos, and practice activities prior to joining the live virtual session.

PRESENTING IN THE VIRTUAL COURSE:

- Practice your delivery, transitions, and interactive activities with other colleagues prior to presenting it to the class. You don't need to go through every activity in real-time, but making your transitions seamless and familiarizing yourself with tool locations will go a long way to maximizing course time.
- Keep an eye on your pace and consider a lecture outline that acknowledges how much time you plan to spend on a section.
- Configure your virtual course settings prior to meeting students: run the tutorial in Collaborate, and do the audio/video setup on the computer prior to the actual meeting time.
- Be visible; make sure you occasionally share your video feed even if you are sharing your screen.

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE VIRTUAL COURSE:

- Designate a faculty member or student helper to assist you by moderating chat. If you co-teach, take turns with other faculty to monitor the chat while you are not presenting.
- Encourage students to use the chat features, including the emoji responses. Some faculty may not feel that "texting" or "chatting" are appropriate, but consider that students who may not always participate as much face-to-face may participate even more when given digital ways to express themselves.
- Using polling to ask questions about comprehension of content or about the content itself.
- Use the raise hand feature to gauge audience response.
- Use breakout rooms to encourage group discussion, case work, etc.

ALLOW FOR STUDENT INTERACTION WITH THE CONTENT, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- Create role-playing scenarios for students to work out in the virtual class.
- Create a schedule for virtual meetings that includes a small group of students who can plan to be called upon to speak, present, or engage in a scenario-based learning activity for that class time.
- Allow students to raise their hands to volunteer for activities.
- Create a "buzz" by posing a question in their Blackboard learning modules for them to consider prior to the class meeting, and let students know they should be prepared to discuss the question or content if called upon.
- Allow students to interact with the virtual whiteboard for problem-solving or brainstorming.

Running a virtual course session takes practice, patience, and acknowledgment that technology doesn't always work to the best of its ability. Being able to stay calm and allow a small break will set the tone for your learning environment.

REMINDERS FOR RUNNING CLASS SESSIONS:

1. Decide ahead of time whether or not you will be recording the lecture. Set a reminder for yourself if you need to.
2. Consider how you will engage with the chat while teaching: by taking a break to read through the chat for questions, asking students to help moderate, or enlisting the assistance of a co-instructor or TA to moderate as you speak. A long chat list can be overwhelming. You may also decide to turn off notifications that signal a new chat message so that they don't become distracting.
3. Interact with students and share your video when you can. Don't force or expect students to keep their videos running the entire session because you will increase the likelihood that people will have audio and video issues.
4. Remember to wrap-up each session with a summary or put a summary of the session in course content.
5. If you are recording lectures, remember to STOP the lecture recording prior to exiting out of the session.
6. Set a plan and let students know how they will be able to access the video recording.

TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRTUAL COURSE SESSIONS

- Update your browsers and consider using Chrome or Firefox exclusively (Collaborate has also certified Edge Chromium for use, but not Internet Explorer).
- Record your sessions in case a student's internet service provider goes out, or their speed dips below the requirements needed for interacting in virtual courses.
- Have a back-up plan for how you will deliver content if *your* internet is not working properly, and alert students to how they will find the content if they are unable to participate in the session. You should record your content delivery and post it in Blackboard if you are unable to hold a session.
- Consider releasing the students if there is an obvious issue with technology that day and direct them toward the next activity while you work on providing a recording of the intended content.
- Close all browsers and tools that are not needed for your course prior to joining your virtual session.
- Open all PPTs or websites in tabs that you will be using for your session prior to joining.
- Free your desktop space of clutter and close your email to prevent sharing confidential information.