

Video-Conferencing Tips and Best Practices for Professors

Familiarize yourself with the equipment and set up

- ✓ Practice using equipment. Become familiar with the equipment and learn to operate it without assistance. Even if a technical person is available for all of your class sessions, learning how to use the equipment will enable you to think of the best ways of using the available equipment.
- ✓ Develop a back-up plan in case of technical difficulties. *A good option is dialing into a speakerphone at the remote location so you can continue your class without much of an interruption.*
- ✓ Run a test session with the remote location or locations that will be connecting to your classroom so you are sure that all of the sites have the right setup.
- ✓ Compile the contact information for technical people at the remote location, just in case something goes wrong. *Share key telephone numbers ahead of the course date with course presenters and other remote course participants.*
- ✓ Consider room set up (background, clock, Smartboard, seating arrangements). Do you want the remote site(s) to see you, the Smartboard or the classroom?
- ✓ Preview local camera angle and preset angles if possible, to ensure that the camera can get the best picture of you and the rest of the class.
- ✓ Carefully consider microphone setup. The most common setup problems involve lighting and sound issues (too dark, washed out, glare, audio feedback, transmission delays).
- ✓ Arrive in the classroom 15-20 minutes early to get organized. (presentation/videos on screen)
- ✓ Connect with the remote site 10-15 minutes prior to the course start time.
- ✓ Set up the desired audio and video parameters for interaction between the classroom and remote sites.

Course/lesson preparation

- ✓ Use e-mail or “chat” to communicate with your remote students as necessary prior to the course.
- ✓ Arrange for **remote** facilitators, guest speakers, technical support etc., well in advance of the course.
- ✓ Prepare lesson plan and materials in advance.
Send your materials (lesson plans and documents) to students ahead of time by posting them to a pre-designated folder/space prior to the course.
- ✓ Remote students should be asked to check that space before coming to class and bring a copy of the materials with them, either on a laptop computer or by printing a paper copy.

- ✓ If your remote students need a paper copy of a document that has been changed at the last minute, arrange for a designated person at the remote location to print and distribute copies, if possible. Make sure you have this type of arrangement worked out ahead of time.

Communication protocols for video-conference sessions

- ✓ Create a contact list for each location and use name tents (for desks) so students learn the names of everyone regardless of their location.
- ✓ Let your students know the netiquette protocol (for asking questions and engaging in discussions during the class).
- ✓ Go out of your way to give remote students the opportunity to present their views.
- ✓ If video-conferencing multiple locations, before beginning a discussion, structure the order of interactions between the sites to ensure all can participate equally.
- ✓ Run an Internet-based chat in parallel to your discussion. Select one moderator at each location to submit questions via the chat tool.

Teaching environment

- ✓ Establish clear roles and responsibilities between the lead teacher and the remote site teaching partner before the start of the course.
- ✓ If the remote location has a computer and projector, have a designated remote student show a copy of the presentation as you're showing it in your local classroom.
- ✓ Decide what to wear (avoid loud distracting patterns, highly contrasting colours such as red, and white or black)

Creating teacher presence during distance courses

- ✓ Learn the names of your remote students and involve them directly in discussion questions. (you may ask remote students to prepare a tent card with their names)
- ✓ Keep your webcam on and allow remote students to share their webcam with you as well.
- ✓ Perform visual checks to make sure that the remote students are present and paying attention.
- ✓ Be cognizant of less overt forms of communication that could be lost in videoconferencing classrooms, such as body language suggesting confusion or discomfort.

Engaging remote students

- ✓ Greet remote students specifically at the beginning of every class to make them feel included.
- ✓ Stay in contact with remote students through e-mail, and arrange special times they can call you in place of a physical visit during your office hours, if required.
- ✓ If possible, travel to the remote locations two or more times during the course and teach from that location.

Other considerations if required

- ✓ Provide or arrange for training of students on the use of the video-conferencing system/application/platform
- ✓ Prepare a videoconferencing etiquette summary for your students.
- ✓ Recommend that individual remote participants wear a headset with a microphone while participating in an audio discussion.
- ✓ For the highest quality audio and video signals, students should be connected through a high-speed (broadband) connection.

References:

<http://westernreservepublicmedia.org/education/edlearn.htm>

<http://clc.its.psu.edu/sites/default/files/content-classrooms/Videoconferencing.pdf>