WSU Videoconferencing Tips and Best Practices
Tips for Creating Student to Student Interaction

TOM TRIPP: So yes. So I'm Tom Tripp. I'm a professor of management. I've been at the Vancouver Campus for with WSU for almost 25 years. If you were using a small room where the operators may not be paying much attention, get to know the remote control. You can control cameras at remote sites and you will need to do so frequently. And again, [INAUDIBLE], that comes back to getting to know your operator.

The first week, of course, start from the remote site. Don't start from the local site. There's a couple of reasons to do that. One is, is it shows that you actually care about the remote students. And this works if it's just one other site or maybe two, you know two other sites. You got multiple other sites, that doesn't work so well. But if you've got just one or two other sites, start from the remote site. They'll be surprised that you did so. It will show that you care. And more importantly, you'll get to see their faces and help memorize their faces, because as you know from lots of video conferencing, people are different in person than they do on camera.

Another thing you want to do the first week is you want to memorize every face and name, and more than that, which I do an all face-to-face classes, I actually take pictures of the students with their name cards. Then I sit down, takes me about a half hour memorize, even with 46, memorize the name, you walked in the second class knowing everybody's names. It's easier to do on AMS if you get a recording of the first class. Go through all the introductions, and you can go back and forwards, back and forwards. And they won't even know that you had the recording. They won't even know that you took a picture. You'll blow their minds. They'll think that you have really excellent memory.

But I'm always up for a good stunt like that. But more importantly, you need to know where everybody is because one of the things you want to do to create this engaging class is you want to grade participation. And if you're going to grade participation, there's fairness issues. And they have to believe that you know who they are. They don't believe that, then they are not going to put up with you grading participation. To the extent that you can, it's a little bit harder, trying to memorize voices. Sometimes you won't have the resolution or you be too far away from the monitor to actually see who's talking to you.

Do you want to make sure you get all the materials to students way, way ahead of time. You can't just walk in and drop things on people. Sometimes you can see on the monitor. You can see a monitor with you on it. And whenever that's a possibility, I always wave at myself. And then I basically count when I can see myself waving back, and that tells me with the lag is for the day. And sometimes it's a quarter second, sometimes, in worst situation, maybe a full second. But even now, a quarter second or half second-lag, you know, it's not even a full second. That's not going to cause any problems, is it? It's going to cause huge problems, especially when all the students are trying to talk. Many students talk at the same time,

because the audio is gated, meaning that only-- the audio only comes through from one site at a time, and so if I'm talking louder than you and you're trying to talk, I can't hear you. Right?

So you have to sort of control that people aren't talking over each other when everybody wants to talk, or they'll stop talking. And then you tend to lose that. So I want to get a sense of delay. Another thing that's really helpful is to control hand raising in a particular way. So I would use different rules. So at my local site, students are in the same room as I am. They-- I would rigorously enforce raising hands. They had to raise their hands. They could not speak until I-- they raise their hands and I call them.

Students at the remote site, though, I allow them to shout out. In fact, I said because if they just raise their hand, particularly if it's going to raise their hand like this, I might not see it. If they're doing this, maybe I'll see it. But if they say, "Hey, it's Tom in Vancouver. I have a question." I'm like, "OK, hold on a second, Tom." And then I'll get back to them. What you want to do, and if you're going to take video conferencing seriously, the video and video conferencing, you have to be able to read faces.

And if you have a class that's highly interactive, and you're trying to manage traffic in terms of conversation, you got to read faces. And if you let people choose their lighting, choose where they sit, and nobody takes care of the zoo, you can't read faces. Lighting, we can't be as well made-up as the TV anchors, but you know, again, turn on the lights. Close the blinds, unless, you might notice I got my blinds open, but I got the light mostly coming in from this angle lighting up my face, better than my overhead lights can.

Another thing that helps, is particularly with younger students who like to wear hats, I have them remove their hats. And the reason is, is because if they have their hats on, you can't see their faces. Their faces are in shadow. The last thing that really helps in terms of creating this sort of interactive presence is the image of you that's going out should include not just you but also include your students. So students, that both sites see each other. And it makes it feel a little bit more like one community. You can even have them, if you say if you do debates in your class, you can have one site take one position on debate, and then the other site take another position. But they should be able to see each other.

Couple other things. When you are doing a lot of student activities, you want to be able to of course, mute the mics. Otherwise it gets really chaotic. If you have multiple rooms and there is an empty room, like currently Yakima is empty, that's OK because the door is close. Sometimes the doors are left open, and what happens is because the-- which site is dominant, is voice or sound-triggered, then what happens is that suddenly interrupts everybody else and then that's-- all you can see is an empty room. So you want to make sure that either those rooms are taken off, are taken offline, or that the mics are muted.

One other thing, that reminds me, is PowerPoint. Another huge mistake I see people make all the time is they're PowerPoint is the center of attention. This is a problem in face-to-face presentations as well as online. But it's a bigger problem online. And so what happens is you've

got the PowerPoint taking up most of the screen real estate. And now you can't even really read the speaker. That PowerPoint better be really, really important, and often it isn't. So that's basically a few tips that I learned from my days teaching on AMS.