

Teaching from a Distance: Strategies and Best Practices

SPEAKER: Welcome to Teaching from a Distance-- Strategies and Best Practices. For this recording, you can use the table of contents on the left-hand side to navigate to a specific topic if you wish.

Today's objectives are define essential terms associated with distance delivery, organized your online course space using best practices, identify expectations to define and communicate in an online environment, identify strategies to engage students in multiple ways, and, finally, locate resources for creating accessible online content.

So let's go ahead and get started with some terminology that we'll be discussing today. First, we'll talk about distance delivery, also known as "distance learning." It's a method of delivery that does not require in-person interactions.

Within distance delivery, we have synchronous and asynchronous. Asynchronous means students are engaged with the content at different times and locations. The other option is synchronous. Students are engaged with the content at the same time, but not necessarily the same location. This training would be considered asynchronous, as it's a recording. And people will be viewing at different times. A live Zoom session would be synchronous.

As we continue today, we will talk about how synchronous and asynchronous delivery are not mutually exclusive. And later in today's session, we're going to talk about strategies that utilize both methods.

The last is Learning Management System, or LMS. This is where you'll house your syllabus, your course schedule, your materials, and links. Students will use this as the hub to get all of the information that they need. Blackboard Learn is the given learning management system for WSU, although we do have some faculty that are starting to pilot Canvas.

How students will navigate your course content is an integral part of the success of any course. Keep in mind that students are navigating multiple course spaces. So it's important that we are simple, consistent, and concise.

We do know that each course has its unique needs. The focus should be how to achieve the learning outcomes in your course. The best practices we're going to list here are not all-inclusive but will give you a structure to begin. These are listed for accessibility reasons and for good pedagogy.

First, limit the amount of scrolling in navigation and within the pages. This helps for organization, simplicity's sake, and for accessibility. Use folders and a clear path to the best of your ability. Don't use one page to dump a lot of content, making it hard to locate a specific resource.

You can employ availability dates to limit what students see, if feasible. An item could automatically be available at a specific date or disappear. Be consistent naming throughout the course space. If your name and assignment "paper one," be sure to use that title through everything-- syllabus, schedule, navigations, folder, the descriptions, a rubric, et cetera. And apply a simple structure from lesson to lesson or week to week.

So our first example that we're going to look at is the navigation in the Blackboard Learn system. In this example, notice that it is so long, it can barely fit on the page. And I assume that you might be struggling to read the words on the page. Remember, one of our best practices is to prevent excessive scrolling. This one in particular has approximately 36 links. In the second example, the navigation is much more clear and succinct.

Clear expectations-- this means expectations for both parties, instructors and students. Norms will need to be set, as some things may not be as obvious when transitioning to an online environment.

For instance, in your classroom, someone could raise a hand. In a digital environment, synchronous or asynchronous, what should your students do when they have a question? Being explicit with your expectations and how to best communicate can help ease the process and, theoretically, decrease the amount of emails you receive.

Here are a few examples of things that should be specifically defined and communicated-- due dates. In some cases, especially if you are adding asynchronous components, due dates need to get added to the existing schedule.

Use the due date function in the LMS. And keep a clear course schedule. If you plan on reusing the course space for future semesters, our suggestion is to avoid typing in due dates in multiple places. This can add complexity of reusing that content and figuring out all the places you need to change the due date.

Feedback can come in many different avenues, through the LMS and during sessions. As an instructor, we will need to be very clear in how and when students can expect to find it.

Instructors will vary when it comes to their communication preference and availability. With the absence of a face-to-face component, be sure to be clear about when, where, and how you are available. For instance, will you have office hours? So students have to sign up for them? Will you have a place in the discussion board? Is your WSU email the best way? Do communication preferences differ depending on the topic and/or day of the week?

Now let's move on to content expectations. Academic integrity-- define it. Define cheating. Make sure it is clear throughout the course space. And revisit it throughout the semester. I would suggest looking at our Promoting Academic Integrity for Online Exams on our Distance Delivery page under Student Work.

Interaction and engagement-- how do you expect students to interact and engage throughout the semester with each other and with you? This would include both synchronous and asynchronous activities. During assignments and assessments, students are going to need to know what you expect and what they would need to do to achieve mastery. So along with what we've discussed previously in terms of organizing the course space, make sure it's consistent and obvious where these instructions and expectations are located.

There are a variety of methods to communicate these expectations to students. When considering how to communicate these expectations, refer back to our course space organization section-- simple, concise, consistent. Consider students are taking more than one course. And they have to juggle expectations from multiple instructors.

A few opportunities to communicate are a syllabus statement. You can add things such as interaction policy, online collaboration, and even copyright. The landing page of the course space-- right when they come in, what do they see? Announcements, a Q&A discussion board, clear instructions, and then rubrics.

Finally, model as much as you can. Model the expectations. And talk about those as you go throughout the semester. Again, consistently reinforce, revisit, and remind students of these expectations throughout the semester.

In this section, we're going to discuss how to engage classes of all sizes by capitalizing on both synchronous and asynchronous strategies and tools. There's no way to cover all of the possibilities. But we're going to try to cover some basics. I encourage you to attend our more in-depth trainings on community building and assessing students.

When deciding between asynchronous and synchronous methods for each part of your course or whether to use both, begin by asking these questions. What happens during class time in your classroom? Lecturing via Zoom is simple and efficient. In addition, this is the modality students are most familiar with. And they might keep students on schedule working through the class.

If your lectures are more conversations and interactive between you and students, there are several tools you can utilize. You can use Zoom's nonverbal feedback, like raising a hand, yes/no. You can use breakout rooms, the chat function, or the polling function.

How big is your class? If your lectures are more conversations between you and students, managing a class of more than about 40 probably will be a challenge. You can still deliver via Zoom. But we recommend you using those tools that we talked about or an asynchronous component in addition to that. How do students demonstrate mastery? And lastly, universal design for learning and accessibility considerations.

Let's go ahead and take a look at ways that content can be delivered. Content can be provided to students asynchronously or synchronous during a live session. Readings, videos, case studies,

OERs, peer teaching-- this is, again, not an all-inclusive list. But there are many different ways that you can deliver content to students.

There are also a multitude of ways to engage students. You can engage them during live class sessions as you would normally if you were face-to-face. You can hold office hours, engaging discussions. This could be synchronicity or asynchronously.

Through feedback, through group work. You could provide choices in how the students engage with the content. Instead of all readings, maybe they can choose a reading or a video or a podcast. Using student-driven approaches to authentic learning. Also, as we discussed before, a Q&A discussion forum.

Some more ideas and resources-- you can employ a muddiest point survey. This will help you identify misconceptions to address during your live sessions or maybe with a recording to send to students. Implement diverse interactions. Create a supportive climate for engagement. And build skills through group learning and with the right tools.

So we've talked about quite a bit overarching. But now let's put it together. Let's cover some examples of how asynchronous and synchronous can work together. In the next few examples, please keep in mind that you can still mix and match within the examples-- again, not all-inclusive. The beauty of distance delivery is the flexibility for you to meet your students' unique needs and your own needs.

In our first example, you can meet synchronously to talk with students, provide some of the content, and tell them what they need to accomplish over the rest of the week. But the remaining content actually is housed in the LMS. And they can actually interact with that asynchronously.

And then be sure to provide a Q&A discussion forum for students to interact with each other and with you throughout the week. So during the week, students can engage with the content, their peers, and you. It adds the comfort of the live discussion at the beginning with Zoom but the flexibility to interact with the content at their own pace.

The next example would be posting all the content prior to meeting. And then meet synchronously just for a Q&A session. So best practice would be to provide various ways for students to receive content, like we discussed. I wasn't going to post it all in here. But there's OERs, the case studies, and that type of thing.

And then for larger classes, you don't even have to meet with the entire class. Maybe you meet with half on one day or a third depending on how large your class is. It can help the students keep moving forward and on task.

The last example is very similar. It's essentially a flipped classroom, where you provide all the lesson content prior to meeting. And then when they meet, you actually get to engage in

learning activities. It's important you still have that Q&A section where they can submit questions beforehand.

Your meeting would occur at the same scheduled meeting times they would meet face-to-face. You can record a brief lecture lesson or pose a question or test the students beforehand. I highly suggest making sure that you talk to your department and your college for specific requirements on your course schedule.

Accessibility-- are you aware of any disability accommodations? Are you aware of any accommodations your students have? Do you have any idea how you would address them in a digital environment? These are important questions.

And we'd like to point out that certain accommodations might differ if they have to change environments. For instance, you have someone that may not be identified with the Access Center in a face-to-face environment but then need an accommodation when they move to distance delivery. To make sure that the diverse needs of our learners are met, we encourage you to proactively make as many documents and videos and content in your course as accessible as possible.

I thank you very much for watching. We have a lot of professional development opportunities. We have additional trainings. We have an on-demand support room available 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. And we also have trainings and workshops. The PDF offered along with this recording will contain all the links that were discussed in this presentation. We look forward to working with you.