



MRFA PD Day – Fall 2020

Online and Remote Delivery – Challenges and Opportunities

Panelists: Erik Christiansen, Kris Hans, Scott McLean, Tim Hilton, and Camille Tabacla

Moderator: Tashfeen Hussain

Synchronous versus Asynchronous Deliveries

In synchronous everything is happening in real time where students and teachers are in the learning environment at the same time forming a learning community. Asynchronous delivery has recorded presentation of information in a variety of formats where information is presented. Hybrid is a mix between these when you get together as a learning community in a class and then engage with other materials at different times.

Synchronous is especially helpful for students who are transitioning from an in person classroom to an online environment. The focus here is on active discussion and questions which can facilitate a certain emphasis of different types of information and dialogue. This can be very difficult in some ways however due to the nature of the online interaction in an online class setting.

Benefits for students:

- they are comfortable in this mode,
- they feel more informed and have the ability to ask questions in real time,
- this facilitates the presentation of different perspectives and discussions,
- This provides the opportunity for the instructor to give guidance and mentorship as required throughout the class and as issues arise

Asynchronous: Flexible environment – meeting student needs in their time.

Important considerations for Asynchronous Delivery:

- Independence and time management are really important for asynchronous modes of delivery.
- Students need to ensure they set the required times in their schedules.
- Instructors need to ensure that their learning platform is set up in a good way that is easy to navigate.
- There should be the ability for learners the opportunity to reflect on information in order to form good responses.
- This has the ability to support introverted learners in other ways in which they perhaps could not access in other learning environments.

The Benefits of Communication

Whether an online course succeeds comes down to communication, especially around clarity and time management – this is important in an asynchronous online environment.



Clear and consistent communication is fundamental in all classroom environments and it is critical for online learning.

Tips to Communicate more effectively to support online learning:

- *Clearly indicate which lectures will be live and which will be recorded.*
- *Provide clear cover sheets on a per module basis indicating module objectives and outcomes.*
- *Assist students in time management by providing direction on time expectations on different elements within the modules and time to complete assignments.*
- *Providing reminders to students.*
- *Provide milestones to help guide students.*
 - *These clear outlines will help students succeed.*

Best courses for synchronous and asynchronous delivery:

- Synchronous – seminar courses, hard science classes (it is difficult to pre-record information of high level formulas)
- Asynchronous – set lectures where there is not a lot of discussion and or student feedback and questions.

Where are we now?

This is still emergency remote delivery – this is not online delivery. In online delivery there are teams involved in developing a fully prepped online course and it can take roughly nine months to create a fully developed online course.

We need to acknowledge that we cannot replicate the classroom environment online. Students should have flexibility – especially in this environment where we do not know the difficulties students are facing.

Tip: Consider compiling and aggregating student questions to develop an FAQ (posted on blackboard) to reduce the frequency of answering the same questions

Student Experiences of Online and Remote Delivery

- What has gone well is that professors have emphasized that they are there to assist students and provide the support that they need.
- Students are managing many different and complex issues and are also having to navigate the difficulties of technology.
- The balance students are having to cope with is a challenge between classes/work/family etc.
- Many students may not know how to effectively prepare for and participate in this remote learning environment and they are coping with a lot of external factors (internet and family demands) are making it difficult for students to engage fully in the learning experience.

Q&A:

Q: Students have expressed the desire for more synchronous learning opportunities in a primarily or entirely asynchronous course: what approaches can be taken to make improvements in mode of delivery mid-point in the semester?



A: The challenge if you switch the structure or expectations halfway is that you may have learners negatively impacted by this; however, you can make more opportunities for synchronous communication with students without changing mode of delivery.

Q: How to keep wifi from crashing regularly during a class: would a booster help?

A: switch to an Ethernet connection rather than wifi or get a booster to assist with the signal if you have wifi deadspots in your house.

Q: (question for the student panelists) from the various types of classes you are taking, are there any specific things you wish every class would include?

A: (Items noted below) *Tips provided by students to assist students:*

- *having a discussion board (though not too onerous of expectations for posting)*
- *recording synchronous lectures and making them available on blackboard*
- *Do not require students to turn on their cameras - students have a lot going on and may not be comfortable with this*
- *Have check-ins during the lecture to ensure students are understanding the content.*

Q: I am also getting more students petitioning for more online time, which I would prefer! I wonder if recording helps the students who are forced to miss synchronous classes.

A: Yes, recording the sessions is beneficial – even for students who do attend it is still valuable for students to be able to refer back if needed.

- Recording classes is very useful
- Recommend using the close caption feature when you are recording. This is very helpful for those who have noisy learning environments.

Q: I am also hearing that some students are struggling with asynchronous delivery. Some of them need connection with faculty and peers. Student mental health is consideration as well I think.

A: Providing icebreakers, group work, and some synchronous communication can help in this regard (more details to follow)

Tip: remember to refer students to Writing and Learning Strategists in Student Learning Services are always happy to help through one-on-one appointments.

The difference between an online class and one converted to online delivery

A **converted class** attempts to directly translate the mode and objectives in a classroom into an online environment using digital tools. This is not a bad thing, but it is difficult.

A **course designed for online delivery** takes into account the advantages and disadvantages and presents the educational material in ways that are most conducive to an online learning environment.

How to re-envision a course for online Delivery:

- Constant interjection of communication using the various tools available
 - Be clear in the expectations and direct students to watch specific videos. Connect the students to their lived experience when they are engaging with the content.
 - Invite reflection to ensure students are engaging with the material

- Not all reflections need to be in discussion boards – reflections could be kept separately in a journal or done independently.
- Presentation of Information:
 - Formatting – use the same types of headings and structure throughout all course materials so that it is easier for students to follow and identify cues.
 - Break up the material into smaller chunks
 - Use lists and bullet points
 - Use images
 - Use active communications around reminders etc.
 - Use folders to clearly organize the readings and related information.
- Engage in a mapping exercise to indicate where people are at and engage them at the beginning of a class:
 - Ask questions about them
 - Ask them to post photos of themselves
 - Faculty should participate in the activities expected of students in this type of work to make students more comfortable to participate
- Assessment and Assignments
 - Testing needs to be open book in some cases and needs to be revised accordingly
 - Revise the amount of time needed to complete an assignment
 - Consider alternate modes of assignments
 - Consider better ways of managing discussion Boards

Q&A:

Q: It seems that many of us are using discussion boards to try to increase the sense of community and connection between students. I have learned from some of my students that they are struggling with keeping track of all the different expectations on the different discussion boards for all their classes. I never realized that discussion boards can cause such additional stress for students.

A: a faculty member asked students whether discussion boards are being used in their classes and if so, how they feel about them. One student commented that "there's too many segments, like there too many posts to go on and manage it needs to be just one big thing" and another felt it was superficial engagement. Another said "even with 1 reply [to a post] ... that's not a conversation." Only one student spoke out in favour of the discussion board, and it was because the instructor was using it as a way for students to practice a task and get feedback on their writing before the marked assignment. In short, my attempt to encourage students to use the discussion board as an opportunity to build connection and community fell flat.

Tip: One original post and one reply is all that should be required for these discussion boards. This should be reduced in weeks when there is an assignment due.

Student perspective – some students like the discussion boards and some others prefer common group discussions. Students should also check in with each other to support and remind each other to engage in these discussion boards.

ADC should be hosting another session on discussion boards later this term or early next term



- [ADC Resources for Remote Teaching](#)
- [ADC Workshops list and registration](#)

Q: How to get students to come for help in groups like they did in person?

A: The group format may be more challenging in the online environment but you can try to group them by last name or encourage them to discuss their common questions amongst themselves and come together.

Tips for managing Student Questions:

- *If you are getting common questions you can refer students to an FAQ folder on blackboard and get students to go there first.*
- *Ask students to converse with each other if they have what may be a common question.*
- *Create a google doc and make it possible for students to put their names next to their questions and then schedule times to talk with students who have identified themselves as interested in a common topic*
- *Have a discussion board on your blackboard site for students to share their questions and go from there to group students together to respond to their questions.*
- Student perspective – students are there for each other and are supporting each other but this is more difficult in the online environment.

[How to Build Better Connections with First Year Students?](#)

First year students are missing the in person component and the disconnect from the campus community, their peers and instructors is difficult for them. Students are wanting to return to normal. As students get accustomed to this type of learning it will be difficult to transition back

Tip: use Mid Class Check Points

Take time to ask all of the students in the class to engage the students and confirm that they are understanding the material.

Students welcome this opportunity to engage directly and it lets the instructor know how things are going and what they need to refocus on or do differently

Tip: Focus on Communication, Trust and Empathy - These are the main issues we are facing right now

- Communication with new students is key
 - Having a healthy form of consistent and clear communication is key.
 - It is important to note generational differences as well between students and faculty: having multiple means of communications helps to bridge that gap and to ensure the information is received and understood
- Trust
 - Remote delivery entails a lot of trust on both sides
 - Faculty trust that students will go through the content on their own and this gives students a sense of ownership and builds connection



- Have lectures transcribed onto your slides to make the information more accessible to students.
- Empathy
 - Empathy is huge: we are all dealing with these difficulties together. It is helpful to acknowledge this shared experience to build empathy. Acknowledge the new students' experience and note that they are not alone.

Tip: Integrate Icebreakers into class

- Getting students to think outside the box which are fun to build connections with students.
- “what kitchen utensil are you...?”

Tip: talk about other matters to build human connections

- Take time to discuss other matters to build connection and empathy.
- Host additional group meetings outside of class time to build connections and get students more involved and connected to each other.

Tip: Use Group Projects and Create Groups More Effectively

- Group projects have helped a lot of students a lot because these promote connections and offsets the isolation they are feeling during COVID.
- ITP Metrics – free to use app developed by UofC – provides a process wherein students fill out forms and then facilitates the creation of groups for group work – this makes a process for creating these groups for optimal outcomes
 - ITP Metrics was developed by Dr. Tom O’Neill at UofC - <https://www.itpmetrics.com/>
 - Interview with Tom about ITP metrics <https://edtechexamined.castos.com/episodes/5-building-better-teams-1>

What are the Pitfalls to Avoid in Online Learning and Using Technology

- Less tends to be more when using technology
- Non-consistent format within a course should be avoided (i.e. if you are using Google docs in view only – then stick to that)
- Focus on mastering one technology rather than incorporating everything
 - By limiting the amount of technology you use you are making it easier for yourself and for your students.
 - You should be able to explain the functions and features of the tech you are using to your students
- Master workflows that work for you for audio video recording.
- The production time for reusable material is huge; however it may save you time down the road.
- Before undertaking the development of good content – do not recreate the wheel.
 - Look for content that already exists. Look into the open courseware (OER) to see what you can integrate.
 - Many materials are available that reinforce core concepts that we teach here which can be used and some of these are very high quality which can be used for repurposing.



- Also, by looking at these you can see what works and does not work in these recorded course materials.

Wrap Up

This is a learning environment for all of us and communication is an extremely important issue. We need to communicate with our students, they need to communicate with us and we need to encourage them to communicate amongst themselves.

We cannot fully replicate the in person environment online – but we can do things which will make this a more comfortable and fun environment for all of us.

Compassion and empathy are very important – we need to be aware of the difficulties we are all facing together and support each other where we can.