Moving from Synchronous to Asynchronous Instruction: Guidelines and Considerations

Moving the delivery of instruction from synchronous (real-time instruction requiring students and instructors to be online at the same time) to asynchronous (allowing students to undertake their learning based on their own schedule) is a useful option for any instructor. However, to do so successfully requires a clear rationale for this transition, especially during this time of rapid change for our campus.

Successful asynchronous instruction should also be delivered in line with best-practices established over the last two decades. In particular, it’s vital that an asynchronous online course be designed with clearly defined learning outcomes in mind, provide interactive learning opportunities to students, and take advantage of robust multimedia content wherever possible. The brief guidelines below provide more detail about how to design and deliver a successful asynchronous course.

Pedagogical Considerations

Both synchronous and asynchronous courses can be pedologically sound and promote a positive student experience. However—like a fully synchronous course—asynchronous course delivery has both notable benefits and limitations to keep in mind. Instructors should consider the following guidelines as they move to synchronous course delivery for the next six weeks:

- **Student Needs**: Students who take online asynchronous courses have chosen to do so based on a number of factors, such as scheduling flexibility (like juggling classes and work), the ability to complete their degree on time, and a need to manage both courses and family responsibilities. Most students don’t initially choose to take a full credit load online, as the transition to asynchronous studies can be challenging, so it will be necessary to provide a simple, consistent model for our students.
- **Learner Isolation**: Students working asynchronously can experience isolation. This needs to be addressed by the way our courses are delivered and the activities built into each course design.
- **Robust Instructional Design**: Moving the delivery of instruction from synchronous to asynchronous delivery requires a more meaningful transition than simply moving lecture notes and PowerPoint slides into the Canvas learning management system. That is, successful online asynchronous courses are not simply self-directed learning courses.
- **Instructor Workload**: Asynchronous online classes, delivered correctly, are more work intensive for an instructor.
- **Assessment Strategies**: There is a tendency for instructors to over assess in online asynchronous courses. Instructors should carefully reevaluate their usual assessment strategy—including assessment types and the number of assessments included in the course—and adjust for this differing delivery model.

Best Practices

Transitioning from synchronous to asynchronous course delivery should be guided by a minimal set of best practices, determined by both research and experience. These include:

- Course content should be accurate, up to date, easy to navigate, formatted in a clear manner, and built around learning objectives that serves student learning needs.
- Course content should utilize multimedia where possible to support student learning and enhance comprehension.
• Instructors should communicate clear expectations regarding instructor and student engagement.
• Instructors should clearly communicate how student work will be submitted and how those submissions will be assessed.
• Courses should include interactive learning experiences supported by instructor presence.
• Instructors should establish a consistently process for providing timely and meaningful feedback, including grades. Students need timely and meaningful feedback.
• Instructors should survey the technological capabilities for each student to ensure that their capabilities are adequate. Students who choose online asynchronous classes know these technological requirements up front before enrolling in an online asynchronous class.

Utilizing Multimedia Resources

Online asynchronous classes should be adequately supported by multimedia resources. At a minimum, these resources should include screen capture lectures or other forms of video lectures. These may be instructor produced or sourced from third-party materials, including textbook vendor or OER content.

The digital strategies team have already created and published professional development resources to support Canvas MyMedia, Kaltura Capture, and Collaborate Ultra. Instructors can enroll in the Canvas Online Professional Development course to access these resources (reach out to canvas@uwsuper.edu to enroll). The digital strategies team is also conducting live training courses regarding the use of Collaborate Ultra. Zoom is a newly licensed tool, now integrated within Canvas, so digital strategies can support Zoom use but has limited capacity to provide in-depth training.

The Library has crafted and published Canvas modules that can be quickly imported into a course to support learning and research.

Developing Multimedia Resources

The process for developing video resources—including video recording, editing, and storage—can vary by the software and equipment used. Instructors should consider the following guidelines when creating new video media:

• Collaborate Ultra can be used to record screencast lectures and is supported by UW System.
• Zoom can be used to record lectures and is supported by UW-Superior.
• Both Collaborate Ultra and Zoom allow for session recording so an instructor can then share that recording in their Canvas course. The procedure for doing so is different depending on which software is used.
• When planning to create a video, consider Canvas storage limits, legal accessibility requirements, and the time required to edit that video before publishing.
  o Recording the entirety of a full lecture will produce large video files. These are very time intensive to produce and edit, can often be difficult to upload, and might not be viewable by students with limited internet connections. Consider breaking your lectures or whiteboard captures into smaller lessons and creating videos from those.
  o To keep files manageable and easier to edit, lectures longer than 15 minutes should be chunked into multiple 10-15-minute long lectures.
  o Video lectures can generally be captured via laptop, tablet or smart phone.
  o In a technical discipline a screen capture approach can provide a simpler and quicker way to produce videos. However, this video format will require a tablet and corresponding software apps. These files are generally smaller and easier to edit or redo.
  o Most instructors should utilize Kaltura Capture to create video recordings and any video produced be uploaded to Canvas MyMedia. These applications are integrated within Canvas,
and are supported by the digital strategies team, and are documented extensively by UW System and UW-Superior staff.

- Videos should be uploaded to Canvas MyMedia and then added to the course as a video “embed,” versus being uploaded to a Canvas course directly. This will prevent you from running out of storage space in your course as MyMedia embeds do not count against course storage limits.

Help and Support

The digital strategies team is available to support instructors wanting to move their class from a synchronous to asynchronous delivery. Please contact Mike Bartlett (mbartle2@uwsuper.edu) and canvas@uwsuper.edu to make an appointment.