

Distance Learning Success Tips for Faculty

While the distance classroom(s) are designed in a way that fits regular teaching practices; it's always helpful to be aware of when teaching in this environment. The list has been boiled down to an executive summary for quicker reading. If you're interested in more detail, contact the CONHP Associate Director of Technology.

Our distance classes are synchronous, online learning environments. This means that distance students are present in an online classroom along with a traditional class of students seated in front of you. This can present a different set of challenges for being both online and face-to-face at the same time. Over the years of practice, we've developed a list of best practices for teaching in our distance environments. The list has been comprised of observing successes of both past and present instructors, exit interviews with students, and through modifying publications from educational technologists and faculty experts in the area of online and distance learning education.

Best Practice #1 – Publish Course Materials to Blackboard

First, the benefit is for both you and the students. You already have a Blackboard course that is setup by the distance learning consultant for posting critical links and materials. The benefit to you will be realized in time savings responding to emails and communicating individually for basic questions such as requests for copies of materials, lecture PowerPoints, quizzes, videos, book pages, learning objectives, etc. Liberal use of a faculty's page for announcements, discussion board postings, and forums communicates to the students that the faculty member cares about who they are, cares about their questions and concerns, and is generally "present" to do the mentoring and challenging that teaching is all about.

Make the course available to students with the syllabus and some preliminary materials about 2-3 weeks before the course begins. The online students are your focus in this scenario. The in-class students will develop bonds to you and the materials first. The online students will require a bit more attention. The [Valparaiso Institute for Teaching and Learning \(VITAL\)](#) can assist you with training in this area.

Best Practice #2 – State Rules for Interruptions and Questions

Deliberately state your expectations for participation for attending in the "4th" or "5th" rows (virtual rows of online students). Clarify for them how to interrupt, when they can speak, and how many times you expect them to share something. Many online students state that they don't feel comfortable interrupting because they don't want to interrupt the flow of the class. As a result, they can feel disconnected from the learning environment. Making your expectations and classroom procedure clear is invaluable for those who attend remotely.

Allow time for a brief delay when it comes to online participation. WebEx, our streaming software, generally does very well with this; however, the individual's connection can slow from time to time. This delay can be very similar to live broadcasts you see on the television. Be patient and allow time for students to think and respond, and for small technical delays in the broadcast.

Best Practice #3 – Engage Online Students

Deliberately call on students attending in the virtual rows to share experiences, thoughts, or answers. Encourage them to speak up and often. This will reduce the stigma they may feel for interrupting. It lowers their level of concern and trains them to be more comfortable as a part of the class.

Best Practice #4 – Connect with Online Students

Send personal emails throughout the course to check-in on those who attend online regularly. Ask them how things are going and if they have any questions or concerns. There's no such thing as over communicating with them on an individual level regarding class progress and addressing individual needs.

Important Things to Know About Valpo's Distance Technology

The room is built so that you, as the professor, shouldn't have to do anything different than you usually do in a regular classroom. However, there are slight nuances as outlined below:

1. We use WebEx to deliver courses. The technology assistant assigned to your class will run all of that for you during class times. However, you also have the ability to use [WebEx for meetings](#), virtual office hours, help sessions, etc. You can sign up for an account at [webex.valpo.edu](#).
2. Students have access to WebEx for Students at [connect.valpo.edu](#). They can host their own meetings with up to 8 people in a meeting. This is a great tool to have students meet on projects at a distance and collaborate when class is not in session.
3. A distance learning technology specialist will be present in your room. These undergraduate students are trained to work the equipment for streaming the course. They have the ability to send handouts to the distance students, along with controlling cameras, posting links to the recordings, troubleshooting basic tech issues for distance learners, and controlling audio.
4. Depending on the campus location of your class, you may have to wear a lapel microphone (some locations on campus are outfitted with microphones and others are not). It will not amplify your sound in the physical classroom, but it will capture your voice for distance learners. Please remember to remove the microphone at the end of class (the student technician can take it from you). Also, remember to remove the microphone and set it on the tech cart if you engage in a privileged conversation with a student, during breaks, and if you should leave the room.
5. The distance learners will be shown on the monitor in the back of the classroom. They should all have their cameras live and the ability to hear and speak to you. It's helpful to engage them from time to time in discussion and encourage them to speak up and be participating members of the class.
6. Certain campus locations have dry erase markers with sleeves over them, allowing us to capture what's written on a white board and broadcast it to distance learners. These marker sets are specific to the rooms they are located. Please leave these in the classroom at the end of the class.

The good news is that you don't have to worry about the vast majority of these nuances. Your tech will handle all the broadcasting. All you have to do is run class as you would normally; just be aware that the distance students have the ability to participate no matter where they are located.

FAQs

What do I do if the student technician doesn't show up?

The classroom technician should arrive 30 minutes before class and be in the class the entire time class is in session (save any breaks you approve for the class/the occasional and brief bathroom break). If they fail to show up 15 minutes before class, you'll find their phone number and other relevant phone numbers posted inside the tech cart at the front of the class. Please call them. If they don't answer or respond, call William Klein.

To whom do I report issues with technology or student techs in the distance learning environment?

Your first line of defense with the technology is the student technician. That said, it's not your responsibility to handle any issues with the student technician. You can report all issues directly to the CONHP Associate Director of Technology.

Where Do I Get Help?

1. VITAL: Instructional Design, Blackboard
 - a. Jen Gregory, jen.gregory@valpo.edu
 - b. Cynthia Rutz, cynthia.rutz@valpo.edu
2. Information Technology:
 - a. William Klein, CONHP Associate Director of Technology, william.klein@valpo.edu, 219.464.5991
 - b. IT Help Desk, <https://helpdesk.valpo.edu>, helpdesk@valpo.edu, 219.464.5678



Still need help?

For additional assistance, contact the [IT Help Desk](#).

Related articles

- [Trim the Beginning and End of Your Zoom Recording](#)
- [Use Google Hangouts or Meet in Your Class](#)
- [Use Google Classroom for a Course](#)
- [WebEx - Share/Download Meeting Rooms Recordings](#)
- [Distance Learning Success Tips for Faculty](#)