Online Synchronous Classes

Strategies for Success

1) **Prepare class objectives and an agenda for each synchronous class**

Preplanning is critical to successfully delivering synchronous classes. Crystallize what you want to achieve in the class session by distilling the class learning outcomes, identifying the information you will impart, collating any instructional tools you will use like PowerPoint slides, documents, casebook or other reference material excerpts, and creating a session agenda to keep you on track. Consider sharing the class agenda with your students before or at the start of class.

2) **Think outside the box when creating your online class**

Consider leveraging additional advantages of the online environment when creating your class agenda.

For example, inviting guest speakers to a residential class is not always easy or practical, particularly if travel is involved. However, synchronous class sessions make it easy for guests anywhere in the world to join the conversation.

Also, group activities and discussions can be challenging to implement in a residential class. However, you can quickly and easily implement these activities with virtual break-out rooms where students discuss and collaborate in small groups.

Explore the capabilities of the platform and consider creative enhancements to your class and teaching methods using the virtual classroom technology.

3) Learn how to use the basic features of the synchronous platform

If you have little or no experience using a synchronous class conference platform, take the time to learn the basic features, including how to present your webcam and files, the chat feature, and recording features.

Depending on your experience, consider setting up a test session to practice using the technology prior to conducting the actual class.

4) Use a webcam to connect with your students and encourage students to use their cameras throughout class

Although synchronous classes may be conducted without video, using a webcam connects you with students. Moreover, encouraging students to use a webcam throughout class fosters a sense of community between students.[1]

Here are some additional tips to enhance the audio/video experience:

- When speaking, maintain eye contact with students by looking into the webcam, rather than at the computer screen;

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[1] Moore, J. & Sener, J. (2009). Getting better: ALN and student success. Journal of Asynchronous Learning Network, 13 (3), 85-114

- Conduct the synchronous class in a quiet room with no environmental distractions;
- Adjust the webcam so that it is level with your eyes;
- Ensure your face is well-lit. Light should shine on your face. Eliminate or minimize any light sources behind your head;
- Use a headset microphone rather than a built-in computer microphone;
- Ensure you have a strong internet connection. Avoid mobile or public Wi-Fi networks.

5) Engage students in active learning

Engaging students in active learning is very important for online classes. Instruction should engage students regularly and require students to contribute to the discussion. Law school students are regularly engaged in active learning via class discussion and professor questioning. Many of these same pedagogical methods can be leveraged in online class sessions.

Here are some additional suggestions to engage students in active learning online:

- Set the tone by engaging students in discussion at the start of class;
- Plan and design engagement activities such as discussion questions and polls to elicit student observations about a case, concept, policy rationale or problem;

- Break students into groups to work through a specific problem or hypothetical and then have them share with the class;
- Incorporate periodic "Knowledge Check" questions and have students input answers in a chat window or as part of a poll;
- Provide Q&A opportunities and invite students to ask questions throughout the session.

6) Create a visual presentation to supplement the learning experience

Supplement your instruction with a visual PowerPoint presentation of the material to provide a more immersive learning experience for all students. Include pertinent graphics, images, web links, and videos as well as important substantive information, hypotheticals, or problems.

When creating a supplemental PowerPoint presentation:

- Avoid "death by PowerPoint." Use visuals, slides and reference materials to *supplement* your instruction.
  - Avoid: dense, text-heavy slides; using too many colors; changing backgrounds, font styles, and font sizes slide-to-slide
  - Use: graphs, infographics, and bulleted lists; short phrases rather than full paragraphs; verbal commentary to explain; relevant pictures and images
- Ensure all text is large enough to read when presented on a small laptop screen (e.g., no smaller than 18 point);

- Consider providing the materials to students (e.g., a PDF of the PowerPoint slides) after the synchronous session;
- Consider making your first slide a recap of the take-aways from the previous class and your last slide a summary of the take-aways from the current class.

7) Additional Tips for Conducting a Successful Synchronous Class Session

Prior to class:
- Login at least 15 minutes prior to the start time;
- Ensure you have a strong and stable internet connection;
- Check your audio and video connections as well as any specific settings for platform features you will use;
- Queue any reference materials that will be used in the class (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, documents, webpages, etc.)
- Turn off phone alerts, email, and messaging applications.

At the start of class:
- Greet students as they arrive;
- Show a "Standby" slide with the course name and the start time so students understand the class session has not yet begun;
- Record the session and post for students to review;

- Provide guidance in the first session – allocate the first 10 minutes of your first online class by giving students a quick tutorial on the software (e.g., how to mute audio/video, type in the chat box, join by phone, raise their hand, etc.) as well as your policies and expectations.

At the end of class:

- Post a link to the recorded class session and materials referenced;
- Provide a question log with responses to any questions that were not addressed during the live session.