

Distance Learning Systems

Teaching Tips #2: Best Practices for Videoconference Delivery

Videoconferencing is a venerable technology being rejuvenated in the University of Alaska by better equipment and higher bandwidth connections to remote campuses. Although effective use is limited to sites on the University Wide Area Network (WAN), videoconference provides a new and exciting alternative to audioconference delivery or face-to-face meetings, which can be expensive, unwieldy, difficult to manage logistically, and not well suited to some materials and curriculum.

In this week's Teaching Tip, we present a synopsis of some of the more important Best Practices for Videoconference Delivery in general:

Test First • Take a few minutes at the beginning of each session to test the equipment. Use this time to take roll call, ask for introductions, etc.

Pay Attention to Clothing • Unlike audioconference, you probably should wear clothes when teaching over videoconference. The clothes you pick should use muted colors and avoid high contrast patterns, bright shades and solid white—all of which can cause glare.

Speak and Gesture Clearly • Videoconference technology is good, but not perfect, so you must learn to speak clearly and avoid overly quick or broad gestures.

Smile at the Camera • Maintain “eye contact” with your students through the active camera. Resist the temptation to stare at the screen when you are speaking.

Avoid “Camera Sickness” • Excessive camera movement can dissociate your students from the material, not to mention inducing nausea. Keep a wide enough camera angle that the camera doesn't normally have to move to follow you... a good rule of thumb is to position the camera so the edge of the picture falls between your hands and elbows with your arms outstretched.

Use Visual Aids • Take advantage of the video presentation to do more than you might with an audioconference: use props, refer to books your students will have with them, whatever it takes to engage your students.

Foster Interactivity • A “good” class pedagogically will be interactive. Ask questions, engage your students in dialogue. Think of your course as an interactive seminar not just a lecture.

Establish Structure • Make clear to your students how you want to provide for interaction. Are you open for interruption or will you provide specific times for questions and answers? Involve students from the start, try to learn and use individual names, be flexible with discussion.

Become Familiar with Remote Sites • You can better serve your students with some knowledge of their endpoint. That way you can help with things like finding a bathroom, accessing a fax machine or copier, and avoiding getting locked out of the building housing the room!

Be Multimodal • Utilize various modes of learning in conjunction videoconferencing: synchronous and asynchronous web presentation, video/DVD materials, and print resources.

Next week we will explore methods to enhance videoconference delivery using cooperative technologies such as document sharing, web material using Blackboard and Horizon Live, and other tools and techniques to create an interactive—and successful—learning experience for your students.