

Teaching Effectively During Times of Disruption

Last Modified on 08/02/2020 7:44 pm EDT

Jenae Cohn, Academic Technology Specialist for PWR, Stanford University, jdcohn@stanford.edu

Beth Seltzer, Academic Technology Specialist for Introductory Studies, Stanford University, bethseltzer@stanford.edu

Edited for McNeese faculty members: Dr. Wendi Prater, Director of eLearning, McNeese State University, wprater@mcneese.edu

Pedagogy in times of disruption

Teaching during times of potential disruption requires creative and flexible thinking about how instructors can support students in achieving essential core course learning objectives. This document offers suggestions for instructors at McNeese looking to continue offering a student-centered learning experience in a remote or online learning environment.

While the process will no doubt feel unfamiliar and at times possibly frustrating, try as much as possible to be patient. There will always be hiccups, but times of disruption are, by their nature, disruptive, and everyone expects that. Be willing to switch tactics if something isn't working. Above all, stay focused on making sure the students are comfortable, and keep a close eye on the course learning goals--while you might not be able to teach something exactly the way you imagined, as long as you're still meeting the learning goals of the course, you're doing fine.

Current McNeese Policies and Recommendations

The most up-to-date university recommendations are located in this faculty knowledgebase. The [Faculty and Staff](#) page is especially useful for clarifying current McNeese policies and resources. Also, visit the [Return to Campus](#) page for guidance, it will be updated frequently as things change.

Synchronous vs. Asynchronous?

There are two options for instructors to facilitate class sessions remotely:

1. **Synchronous:** instructors and students gather at the same time and interact in "real time" with a very short or "near-real time" exchange between instructors and students.
2. **Asynchronous:** instructors prepare course materials for students in advance of students' access. Students may access the course materials at a time of their choosing and will interact with each over a longer period of time.

Instructors may choose to engage their students synchronously or asynchronously depending on the course content or material that needs to be taught. There are many advantages and disadvantages to asynchronous and synchronous teaching options.

Advantages of Synchronous Teaching

1. Immediate personal engagement between students and instructors, which may create greater feelings of community and lessen feelings of isolation
2. More responsive exchanges between students and instructors, which may prevent miscommunication or misunderstanding

Disadvantages of Synchronous Teaching

1. More challenging to schedule shared times for all students and instructors
2. Some students may face technical challenges or difficulties if they do not have fast or powerful Wi-Fi networks accessible

Advantages of Asynchronous Teaching

1. Higher levels of temporal flexibility, which may simultaneously make the learning experiences more accessible to different students and also make an archive of past materials accessible.
2. Increased cognitive engagement since students will have more time to engage with and explore the course material.

Disadvantages of Asynchronous Teaching

1. Students may feel less personally exchanged and less satisfied without the social interaction between their peers and instructors.
2. Course material may be misunderstood or have the potential to be misconstrued without the real-time interaction.

Identifying Key Tools and Functions within Moodle

If you are new to using Moodle, you may appreciate some orientation to key Moodle tools and functions.

- **Assignments:** Instructors can create space for students to upload submissions, from informal reflections to formal written assignments and projects. Instructors can select the grading approach within the assignment. Assignments are best for instructors who wish for the students' work to only be viewed and assessed by the instructor.
- **Announcements:** Instructors can send mass e-mails or messages to the whole class community via the Announcements tool. The benefit to using Announcements over e-mail is that instructors do not need to collect individual student e-mail addresses and that the messages are archived in the course Moodle site.
- **Chat:** The whole class, instructors and students alike, can engage in a "real time" text-based, instant messaging conversation. Messages received in Chat remain archived and can be read outside of synchronous time too. This can be a nice way for instructors and students to communicate nimbly without needing to use voice-based chat and without needing to use any outside apps or resources.
- **Discussions:** Instructors can create threaded, written discussion forums for instructors to engage in written (or audio/video) dialogue with each other and respond to written prompts.
- **Files:** Instructors can post key course documents, like the syllabus, readings, assignment sheets, and activity descriptions in this space.
- **Modules:** Instructors can organize course content into several chunks or groups of learning content. The pieces of information that students will access, including the syllabus, assignment sheets, activity descriptions, and outside links and resources, can be grouped together in the order that students might access those resources during a synchronous or asynchronous class session. Modules can give students access to readings, activity descriptions, outside links, and assignment submission links all in one place.
- **Book:** Instructors can create content for students to read or access that is not already created in a separate website or in a Word Document or other kind of document. The settings for Pages can also be changed so that the page can be edited by both instructors and students to create a class Wiki.

For more information about the differences between organizing Moodle course pages in Modules, Pages, or Files, review additional articles in this faculty knowledgebase.

What is Teams and BigBlueButton?

Teams and BigBlueButton are a video-conferencing platforms for which McNeese owns a licenses. Teams and BigBlueButton allows you to engage in live Web conversations with your students using audio, video, and text-based chat features.

Unlike a video-conferencing program like Skype or Google Hangouts, you do not need a unique username or account to use Teams or BigBlueButton. Instead, your McNeese ID and password will allow you to access these tools from the MyMcNeese > Office 365 page (Teams) and within Moodle (BigBlueButton). Participants can then follow the web link to join in on a live conversation.

How to access Teams

How to access BigBlueButton

SHIFTING YOUR CLASSES ONLINE

You have three options for shifting your classes temporarily online:

Option 1: Run Your Class Live as a Virtual Meeting

McNeese has licenses and support for faculty to use Microsoft Teams or BigBlueButton. This option works especially well for small discussion-based classes, though it's also effective for large lectures, especially if you have a moderator.

The Tech Side:

Already a Moodle User? Using Moodle with BigBlueButton or Teams makes it easier for students to locate the discussions.

Don't use Moodle much? You can still use McNeese's Teams and Meet Now accounts. Read [the article Web Conference, Virtual Meeting, Virtual Classroom Resources](#) to set up your meeting session.

Pedagogical Recommendations

- **Use slides and screen sharing** within the web conference to make sure discussion questions are visible to students who may have a slow Internet connection or who may struggle to hear the audio for the initial question. (Look for "Share Screen" at the bottom of your meeting platform.)
 - On your first slide, **display an agenda** at the start of the class session so that students know what to expect of the shared time together.
- **Use the chat in virtual meeting.**
 - To moderate discussion, i.e., allow students to "line up on chat", "wait in a queue" to comment or to speak, to help them break into the conversation.
 - For larger classes, assign a graduate assistant, TA to moderate the chat and make sure important questions and comments are addressed. Even for smaller classes, it may be worthwhile to ask a student (or two) to take on special roles as "chat monitors" to voice if there are questions that arise that the instructor has missed.
 - You might use the chat to troubleshoot technical problems. For example, if a student is having trouble connecting via audio or video, the chat might be a space for you as the instructor or for fellow students to work together to problem-solve. This may, again, be an opportunity to assign a student to a special role, especially if you have students eager to help on the technical aspect of things.
 - If you have a TA or a fellow who can support the class instruction with technical help, this would also be a good person to respond to troubleshooting tips in the chat.
- **Use BigBlueButton Breakout Rooms** to help students talk in smaller groups (just as they would do break-out groups in a larger class environment). See this [article](#) for help on using BigBlueButton.
- **Rethink your classroom activities** to make the class more interactive even if web conference students don't have ideal connections and aren't able to hear and see everything perfectly.
 - Have students write and comment together on a shared Word or Google Doc.
 - Try using [Poll Everywhere](#) or [Google Forms](#) to collect student responses, and then share results with both in-person and online students.
- **Consider making discussion questions available in advance** in Moodle, etc. so that students can access the questions if screen sharing does not work. If sharing slides in advance to Moodle, share as PDFs, as students will be able to access the material on their phones.

A Few Troubleshooting Tips:

- **If your microphone is not working**, use a phone number to connect. You can use your phone as the microphone and audio source for your call rather than your computer's built-in microphone if necessary.
- **If your Internet connection is slow or lagging**, consider temporarily turning off your video stream and only

maintaining the audio stream. Sometimes, running the web camera on your computer will use up the Internet's bandwidth in a way that might make communication challenging. Turning off the video should improve communication quality and consistency.

- **If you have earbuds or a headphone set, wear them!** Wearing earbuds or headphones will reduce the amount of noise that your computer will pick up during your quality, which will make it easier for your students to hear you. Similarly, you may want to advise your students to wear earbuds or headphones during the call.
- **Advise students to mute their microphones if they are not speaking and unmute the microphones when they wish to speak.** Students may be joining web conferencing calls from all kinds of different locations, many of which may create background noise that could be distracting. Encourage students to mute themselves if they're not speaking to minimize unnecessary or distracting background noise. Using the "raise hand" feature or simply seeing the microphone unmuted will give the group a visual cue for when a student wishes to speak.
- **Check the "chat" space for student questions and contributions.** Some students may not have working microphones and, therefore, may be unable to contribute via voice. The chat room is a good place for students to contribute, ask questions, and be involved.

Option 2: Pre-Record Your Lectures

If you are not comfortable presenting live, another good option is to pre-record any lecture material and upload it to Moodle. Or use BigBlueButton in Moodle to record your lecture.

The Tech Side:

Already a Moodle User? Using Moodle with Teams and BigBlueButton makes it easier for students to locate the discussions. BigBlueButton is already integrated into McNeese's Moodle Site. Teams meetings can be recorded and shared in Office 365 or on YouTube.

If you follow the steps, in a few minutes to a few hours (depending on the length of the video), completed videos will be automatically uploaded to your Moodle course -> BigBlueButton.

Don't use Moodle much? You can still use McNeese's Teams and Meet Now. Read the article [Web Conference, Virtual Meeting, Virtual Classroom Resources](#) to set up your meeting session.

Basically, you'll want to open up your Powerpoint or slides, make sure you're recording, and then use Team's "Share Screen" tool.

Pedagogical Recommendations

- **Keep videos short and lively.** It is often harder to focus on a video than on a person! [Check out some tips for creating lively short online videos from online educator Karen Costa.](#)
- **Test your microphone** to make sure that you have good sound quality. Consider using a headset with an external microphone to capture better audio.
- **Consider ADA compliance.** Automatic closed-captioning is not perfect. Speak clearly and not too quickly to make the content as accurate as possible. If using a tool other than Microsoft Team or BigBlueButton for recording your lecture, consider **uploading your videos to YouTube** to take advantage of their automatic (though not perfect) closed-captioning. You can also create transcripts using Google Documents > New Google Docs > Tools > Voice Typing.
- **Integrate interaction with the lecture material.** You might consider setting up a Moodle discussion board with some specific questions, using a quiz, or setting up a chat session for a text-based live discussion.

Option 3: Skip the Video

Many online courses do not have a video component at all. If you are not sure you have the right equipment and are

uncomfortable with the tech setup, this might be a good option, at least for the short-term.

Pedagogical Recommendations

- **Annotate your slideshow with notes** and share this with students using Moodle or email
- **Set up a discussion** for students in Moodle. Use specific, structured questions, and let students know expectations for their responses.
- **Share links to outside resources.** Encourage students to watch videos, read articles, etc.
- **Use Chat** as a Moodle activity, in BigBlueButton or in Microsoft Teams to have a live, text-based chat session with students.

Office Hours

Set up virtual office hours to meet with students using your webcam, share your computer screen or collaborate using Teams's or BigBlueButton's. If you are more comfortable, you can also give students your phone number to call, or you can set up an online chat in Moodle as an activity, using Teams or BigBlueButton.

Not familiar with Moodle? You can still use Teams or Meet Now. Read the article [Web Conference, Virtual Meeting, Virtual Classroom Resources](#) to set up your meeting session.

Pedagogical Recommendations

- **Keep the link to the BigBlueButton room you're using for your students in a central place on your course in Moodle.** The main factor to consider when holding office hours or conferences with students via web conference is your accessibility as an instructor. Make sure they know how to find your "office" (just as you might offer them directions to your office on-campus).
- **Encourage students to share their screen with you.** Screen sharing is possible not just for the instructor in Teams, but for students too. Help your students navigate towards a screen sharing option so that they can show you their written work on their screen.

Using Moodle for Announcements, Sharing Material, Collecting Assignments, and Grading

Many instructors already use Moodle regularly for tasks like sending announcements to their courses, sharing course materials, collecting assignments, and giving students grades and feedback.

If you're not already using Moodle for some or any of these functions, this might be a good opportunity to become more familiar with the platform.

- Use this [Faculty Knowledgebase](#) for step-by-step setup instructions. Type keywords like "Moodle" or "Gradebook" into the search bar at the top of this site to find articles.
- Add your Syllabus to your Moodle course.
- Keep your students up to date by posting Announcements in Moodle. Suggest that students check their Moodle notification preferences to make sure they are set to receive announcements via email.
- Create an Online Assignment to allow students to submit files through Moodle.
- Upload your course content to Moodle.
- You can manually enter and edit grades in the Grade book. McNeese has published many articles to set up Moodle grade books in this [Faculty Knowledgebase](#).

Written Discussions

To remove technical hurdles and to ensure that students are able to engage with peers and each other in a discussion-based class (even without a strong Internet connection), you might choose to move student discussion to an asynchronous format. Create a Moodle Discussion as a forum to facilitate communication, encourage students to interact, ask questions and respond to discussion prompts.

Pedagogical recommendations:

- **Craft discussion questions to be as clear and as specific as possible** so that students can build off of the question for a sustained response. See [“Conversation Starters: Orchestrating Asynchronous Discussion to Build Academic Community among First-Year Writers”](#) by Dan Seward
- **Assign roles to students** so that they understand when and how they might respond to you or their peers. For example, students might “role play” as particular kinds of respondents or you might ask them to do particular tasks (e.g. be a summarizer, a respondent, a connector with outside resources).

Chat

You may not currently be using a chat function in your class, but it can be a useful tool, especially for student office hours or for students who may be more comfortable asking questions via chat compared to by phone or video calls.

In Moodle, there is a Chat tool available that functions as an instant messaging platform. The messages in chat are visible to the full class community and can be read in real time.

Individual Students Using Microsoft Teams or BigBlueButton to Attend In-Person Classes (Small, Discussion-Based)

Synchronous Tool Recommendation: Microsoft Teams and BigBlueButton

Some students, due to compromised immune systems, etc., may want to web conference into class. The challenge is to make sure that students joining by web conference feel like full participants in the class. Web conference participants often struggle with poor sound quality and a sense of disconnection.

- **Position your computer** so that students can see and hear as well as possible. If necessary, repeat on site/in classroom student points for the web conferenced crowd, only if you are close enough to be heard. You might consider bringing or borrowing a microphone to make it easier for students to hear the on campus discussion.
- **Solicit input from web conferenced participants**, as students connected online may have a harder time breaking into the conversation.
- **Assign a student to moderate** the web conferenced chat and to speak up for an online participant with a question or a raised hand.
- **Share handouts and slides** in advance to make sure online participants can look at them. These handouts and slides could be shared via links in the web conferenced chat room or by directing the student(s) to the appropriate place in Moodle where the materials may be available.
- **Rethink your classroom activities** to make the class more interactive even if web conferenced students don't have ideal connections and aren't able to hear and see everything perfectly.
 - Have students write and comment together on a shared Office 365 work space through MyMcNeese or a Google Doc.
 - Try using [Poll Everywhere](#), Microsoft 365 Forms in MyMcNeese or [Google Forms](#) to collect student responses, and then share results with both in-person and online students.
 - If doing group work, consider an alternative activity for web conference students. If multiple students are online, put them in a group together to discuss.

Live-Streaming In-Person Lectures

If lectures continue to be held in person, but some students or faculty members, particularly students with any immunity issues, need other ways to access the lecture material, you have several options. The one that is best for you really depends on the physical space of your class, your comfort with tech, etc.

The main challenge of these situations is usually making sure that the sound quality is good enough for students to hear.

Synchronous

- **Use Microsoft Team or BigBlueButton**, as you would in small classes. Mute all participants, and make sure someone is monitoring chat.
- **Use Chat in Moodle or connect by mobile phone**, if web connection is weak or is not an option for the student.

Asynchronous

- **Record lectures using your phone, or video cameras or audio recorders** that you have on your computer or tablet. Upload to Moodle when you're done, along with any slides.

Scheduling Tools for Student Tutorials/Conferences

Asynchronous

Recommended Tool: Moodle Calendar, Microsoft outlook from MyMcNeese

If you usually send around a physical sign-in sheet, you might be looking for alternatives that let you schedule appointment slots with students.

You may book and reserve time with students in a couple of different ways:

- **Scheduler/Appointment Tool through Outlook.** Through MyMcNeese students and faculty can use the calendar feature to schedule an appointment. Instructors can post a Moodle announcement or post a Moodle calendar event for dates and time to schedule appointments.
- **Create a Microsoft Forms Doc/Sheet in MyMcNeese and link in to it from the course in Moodle or as a Moodle announcement.** Create an openly editable Word Document or Form or Excel spreadsheet with a table of available appointments for students to sign up for appointments. The link to edit the Doc or Sheet could be shared via an Announcement in Moodle or could be directly embedded into a Page or Module within Moodle.

Peer Review

Synchronous Recommended Tool: Sharepoint, Word Docs & Teams or BigBlueButton

Asynchronous Recommended Tool: Moodle or Microsoft 365 Word Docs

Pedagogical Recommendations

- Write out clear and specific instructions about the expectations for peer review. This means specifying the qualities of writing that students may want to look for in each other's work. Distributing guiding questions or a worksheet that students can fill out as they review their peer's work can be a valuable supplement to guide students' virtual reading.
- If you are **introducing peer review synchronously** (via web conferencing platform) and having students work in real time in Office 365 Word Docs, consider:
 - Engaging the students in a chat-based or video-based conversation about their expectations for peer review
 - Have students use the chat box feature to share ideas about what makes for effective peer review
 - Use a polling tool, like PollEverywhere or Office 365 Forms, to collect ideas about students' impressions of and expectations for peer review
- If you are **introducing peer review asynchronously**, consider:
 - Opening up a discussion forum with a prompt that invites students to share their past experiences with peer review. What worked? What didn't? What are their goals this time? Aggregate student responses to create a document that outlines the class expectations and understandings of effective peer review experiences.
 - Ask students to include questions for their peer reviewers at the top of their document so that their reviewers can have a sense of what the author would like them to focus on.
- Include links to technical documentation and support so that students can troubleshoot if they are not able to access peers' documents.

Meetings with Department or Teaching Teams

Synchronous Recommended Video Tool: [Microsoft Teams](#)

While you may be able to meet your department and Faculty member colleagues in person, McNeese is temporarily waiving the requirement for in-person meetings. The easiest way is for one team member to schedule a Teams meeting and send the link to everyone else.

You can do this from outlook or download the Teams Meeting app to your computer, phone or tablet, and use the app to launch a teaching team member's personal meeting room. Others will be able to just click the link. In Outlook, select the "Team Meeting" toggle when setting up the meeting.

Best practices for web meetings:

- Have a clear agenda and keep an eye on time--it's easier for people's attention to wander during web meetings
- Sometimes starting with something personal (a quick check-in) can make these meetings feel more personal

Outside Tools?

We're not recommending going outside of McNeese's existing ecosystem of online tools (Moodle, Microsoft Teams Meeting, BigBlueButton, Respondus, ProctorU, etc.), at least not right now. There are some fantastic ed tech tools out there, but it takes quite a bit of vetting to make sure they have responsible student data handling policies, are accessible, etc. The best option in times of disruption is to stick with the tools which McNeese has already vetted and can provide tech support for as needed.
