Tips for Teaching with Videoconference Systems

Video Conferencing Facilitator Responsibilities

- Make sure the technical support providers at each site are aware of any educational media materials you will be incorporating into your presentation. Different technical needs often affect the way a conference is set up.

- Learn how to use the technology available to you. Don't be shy about asking for practice with the equipment, to avoid an awkward moment during the videoconference.

- Know who will be in control of the camera and microphone at your site. If that will be you, make sure you know how to operate the equipment.

- Having a facilitator at each site to coordinate the videoconference can be critical when large groups are involved.

- To avoid confusion or distractions during the videoconference, all facilitators should be aware of the agenda of the event. Sharing this agenda with the technical support staff can help assure that things go smoothly.

- Arrive early for the conference to insure that the room is set up appropriately, handouts are in order, the network connection works, people at each site are audible to each other, etc. Recommended arrival time is at least 30 to 60 minutes before the scheduled start time.

- Share your contact info with staff coordinating the conference at other sites. Make sure there is a land-line or cell-phone where you can be reached by the other sites.

- Make sure you have contact information for the technical support staff at each site. Make sure you know the connectivity information (such as the IP address) for your site.

  - When you distribute materials to your on-site class make sure these same materials are given to the students at the remote site. Try to create print handouts for remote students to view for any materials in your presentation that aren't going to be projected digitally (film slides, old-style overheads, etc.).

Video Conferencing Etiquette

- Speak with a normal speaking tone and pace. You should not need to raise your voice, but videoconferences don't reward subtle asides either. Speak in a strong, clear voice, using tone inflection and body language.

- To avoid loss of picture quality, move in a fluid, non-distracting way.

- Sessions with more than two sites are typically voice-activated, shifting the picture to whichever of the other sites last made a sound. Be aware that muting your site's microphone will prevent other sites from hearing sound from your location and possibly even prevent your being seen.

- That said, ask that each site to mute its microphone when no one at that site is speaking. Coughing, shuffling papers, and even drumming of fingers can shift the camera and sound to your site, and are also very distracting at the far end because of the amplification.

- Be careful of what you say and the gestures you make. Even if you believe your microphone is muted, don't speak inappropriately off-line – it's unprofessional. Some videoconferences are recorded for future viewing. You might even be mistaken about whether your microphone or camera is off!

- In conferences involving more than a handful of people, participants should announce their names when they start speaking. This will allow time for the camera to shift to the right location. It's especially important in a conference with more than two sites, where the picture will shift to the site that is speaking. It also can prevent inadvertent interruptions.

- Joining in a conversation can be awkward in videoconferences, because there is a slight audio delay between sites built-in for noise-cancellation purposes. Continue your full thought once you begin speaking for at least a moment, even if you think you might be interrupting. That said, try to be polite and respect other speakers. In videoconferences, when two people speak at the same time, it can often be technically impossible to listen to both of them just because of the limits of the technology! The efforts of a good facilitator to give a turn to each participant can go a long way in making sure that everyone is clearly heard.

- **As always, be yourself!**

Beginning the Conference

- Begin on time.

- Allow time for some initial informal chit-chat between sites. This time for getting acquainted isn't considered unprofessional; it's necessary for creating a truly interactive videoconference between distant locations. From a technical standpoint, it also provides technicians a low-pressure opportunity to check audio levels at each site and make last minute microphone adjustments.

- Participants at a remote site can often act passively, especially if they feel invisible and inaudible to the participants at the other sites. It's the instructor/facilitator's responsibility to assure far-end participants that they can be seen and heard, and to respond to their questions and needs in the same way as participants in the same room.

- As you would in a regular class, make sure participants at all sites know from the start of the conference whether it is appropriate to interrupt you with questions, or if they need to wait until the end of the conference.

- When asking the participants whether there are any questions, it's a great idea to ask the participants at a remote site specifically. For example, "Are there any questions in Bend? Do the students in White Stag have anything they want to ask?"

What to wear

- What you wear can have a dramatic effect on the quality of the videoconference. Wearing clothing with bold or busy patterns can cause a camera's focus to oscillate and result in poor picture clarity. For the best results wear medium to dark colored solid, non-patterned clothing. Avoid also black and bright red, which cause some problems as well.

- White clothing can cause glare in the picture. Pastel clothing is a better alternative. If you do wear white, consider putting on a jacket or sweater to provide visual contrast for the camera.

- Avoid jewelry that jingles or clothes that make noise.

- Avoid red lipstick or dark eye shadow, which may not appear as intended across a conference.