Course Syllabus - Synchronous Classrooms

Welcome to Synchronous Classrooms. Moving beyond the well-known asynchronous learning environment, this course will explore the ideas behind and skills needed to teach online in real time - synchronously. By addressing the pedagogical foundations first and then identifying and practicing the new skill sets, the course will prepare participants to better plan and manage the synchronous classroom. Please note that there are no textbooks required for this course. All materials are available online!

Instructor Information

This course will be taught by two instructors who will team together to challenge you and model best practices in the synchronous classroom.

Susan Manning: is an experienced virtual instructor with the MVCR program. Susan generally teaches Online Learning: An Overview and Technology Tools for Education. More about Susan can be found at

E-mail: smanning@uillinois.edu
Phone: 630-897-8214

Kevin Johnson: is the newest full-time member of ION's staff. He has been teaching technology for the past 10 years. More about Kevin can be found at

E-mail: kejohns@uillinois.edu
Phone: 217-265-8177

Both instructors will be active in the virtual classroom on a daily basis.

Course Description

This course runs 4 weeks. You will probably spend a minimum of 10 hours a week working on the course itself, including time spent reading, writing to respond to questions and interact with classmates, downloading and installing necessary software and attending the required synchronous sessions. While the asynchronous online format provides flexibility as to when and where participants learn, the synchronous classroom requires real time meetings. This course will meet on the following days and times for one hour. Please be prepared to schedule a minimum of a half an hour before each session to configure your computer, etc.

- Wednesday, June 1, 2005 at 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, June 8, 2005 at 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, June 15, 2005 at 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, June 22, 2005 at 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, June 29, 2005 at 7:00 p.m.

Participants are required to log on to the course a minimum of 3 times a week, but as discussions develop, you will probably log on more often (4-5 days a week). Topics to be covered in this course are the following:

- An overview of the underlying pedagogical assumptions behind asynchronous and synchronous teaching and learning.
- The text-based synchronous classroom, possible tools and skill sets needed to teach most effectively.
- The voice-based synchronous classroom, possible tools and skill sets needed to teach most effectively.
- The multi-modal synchronous classroom, possible tools and skill sets needed to teach most effectively.

Course Goals and Objectives

At the end of the course, participants will be able to

- distinguish the pedagogical value of asynchronous discussion versus synchronous communication and make decisions about the use of each tool appropriately for their teaching situations.
- determine the appropriate applications of text based chat, voice based chat and multi-modal synchronous delivery systems in their courses.
- plan text and voice chat sessions with instructional objectives, an agenda, prompts and a plan for trouble shooting.
- identify instructor competencies necessary to facilitate a meaningful text or voice chat sessions as well as multi-modal synchronous delivery systems.
- plan and experience content delivery and the art of getting others engaged and active in a multi-modal synchronous delivery system, like Elluminate.

Course Structure

The course has a modular structure, which is consistent and predictable. The course Web site has a straightforward design and is easily navigable. Instructions and due dates for activities and assignments are clearly articulated so students know what is expected of them and can easily stay on track. Due dates of weekly assignments are staggered throughout the week (see the course calendar) in order to give participants time to read and comment on their classmates' work before the scheduled synchronous session. The course design is based on principles of collaborative learning and active participation, as well as sharing of thoughts and problem solving.

For each course module, participants will be presented with a text-based lecture along with hyperlinks to related online articles. Participants will engage in guided discussions about these topics via the asynchronous conferencing forum. Discussions will be prompted by "advanced organizer" questions inviting participants to consider the topic as it relates to their own personal teaching situations. At the end of each module, participants will experience a synchronous

session modeling the theme of the week and further exploring the salient issues. Each synchronous session will last one hour.

At the end of each module, participants will submit a short summary of what they believe are the most important things they learned that week and how it relates to their job.

Assigned readings and responses to discussion questions should take place during the module in which they are assigned in order to get the most benefit from the discussions. Instructions and due dates for activities and assignments are clearly articulated so students know what is expected of them and can easily stay on track. Due dates of module assignments are staggered in order to give participants time to read and comment on their classmates' work. We know you have lives beyond the scope of this course and since professional adults often have free time on weekends, we have also taken that into consideration. However, if you will be unable to complete an assignment due to professional obligations notify the instructor. Better yet, prepare the assignment early and post it. This will give your classmates a head start in reading and responding to your work. See the course calendar to get an overview of when assignments are due.

Course Requirements

The following activities and requirements apply to this course:

- Log into the course a minimum of three times a week to stay active and involved.
- Read the instructor's lesson introductions and assigned articles from the Web.
- Answer weekly discussion questions related to the assigned Web articles.
- Prepare and submit other assignments (e.g. synchronous session plans, contributions to course wiki)
- Engage in positive and meaningful dialog with classmates concerning the course subject matter.
- Attend the required synchronous sessions.
- Write a summary of the key items covered each week and how they apply to your field of teaching.

Communication Tools

Several forms of communication will be used during this course.

Moodle Forums
Moodle discussion forums are the heart of this online course. It is where you will submit all of your assignments, and where you will discuss your work with your classmates.

Text-based Chat
what tool and when?

Voice-based Chat
what tool and when?

Elluminate
Elluminate is an example of a multi-modal synchronous delivery system. when?

Email
You have the ability to subscribe to Moodle discussions so that you can read course activity within your email client. This is also one means of communicating privately with classmates or instructors.

Telephone
The telephone is still sometimes the most effective mode for troubleshooting technology problems or other issues related to the course. Your instructor's phone numbers and other contact information can be found above.

Pedagogical Rationale for Assignments

Course Orientation:
Within the first three days of the course, students will submit a short biography of themselves to the forum area. This assignment gives participants practice with using the conferencing program and creates a sense of community. It also helps students find common links among themselves.

Module Discussion Questions:
The questions serve as advance organizers to encourage critical thinking and informed participation. Due by the date they are listed on the course calendar, specific discussion questions (requiring a 150-300 word response) will be assigned to individuals with ensuing discussion from all course members. The time specified for the initial posting ensures that all participants have ample opportunity to interact.

Planning Documents:
Participants will periodically plan synchronous sessions on paper, with careful consideration given to the pedagogical rationale for using the tool, and agenda that includes sample activities and prompts, and troubleshooting ideas. These assignments underscore the need for planning and help participants begin to identify skill sets they may need to develop.

Best Practice Wiki:
As a shared knowledge building activity, participants will add to and edit a class document that identifies and explores best practices in teaching in the synchronous classroom. This activity encourages critical thinking and informed participation.

Module Summaries:
By the end of the module, students will submit a 100-200 word summary of what they feel to have been the most important points covered in the course that week and relate this to their own teaching goals. This exercise has four functions:

- It helps the students reinforce and synthesize the material covered.
- Each student personalizes the material, adapting it to his/her own specific professional needs.
- Students get a multitude of perspectives on the week's subject and how it could be useful to them.

- It gives insight to the instructor to understand what parts of the course have been effective and what may need to be taught in more depth the next time.

Assessment Criteria

Since this course serves as a model for students as they design their own online courses, assessment, grading criteria, and procedures are important to articulate and model. With this in mind, the assessment criteria that apply to this course have been carefully laid out. See the assessment page in the course orientation for the course assessment procedures. Also, as assignments are made, rubrics to those assignments will be linked when appropriate.

Description of Course Modules

Module 1 - What is Synchronous Learning?

Topics:
We will begin to look at the general topic of synchronous learning and compare and contrast this with asynchronous teaching. A specific learning objective for this module is to develop a functional understanding of the difference between the two methods and the appropriate pedagogical considerations for each. Furthermore, the group will articulate best practices in synchronous and asynchronous teaching and will use asynchronous tools to develop community through introductions and thoughtful dialogue.

Readings for Module 1:

- Teach Online: Pedagogy and Techniques
  http://teachvu.vu.msu.edu/public/pedagogy/class_discussion/index.php?page_num=2

- The Use of Online Synchronous Discussion Groups to Enhance Community Formation and Professional Identity Development
  http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/archives/2002/fall/04/index.html

- Online Interaction Tools Resource Sheet
  http://www.fullcirc.com/community/toolgrid.htm

- Creative Use of On-line Discussion Areas
  http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/discuss/

Assignments for Module 1: (more specific directions will be given at the start of the module, when the link to module 1 shows on your navigation bar and on the course module page.)

- Biographic Introduction: Post an introduction that describes who you are, what you teach and what you hope to gain from this course.

- Discussion Questions: Answer an assigned discussion question (150-300 words) and read/respond to at least two other students' posts.
- Best Practices Wiki: Add to wiki of best practices. Contribute one idea (or edit one existing idea) that discusses the pedagogical value of synchronous or asynchronous tools in a course.
- Attend the required synchronous session.
- Key Items: Reflect on the major principles and issues for this module and apply them to your specific work situation.

Module 2 - Text-Based Chat

Topics:
In this module we will look at the text-based synchronous classroom. We will discuss appropriate uses of this method of teaching, and we will identify characteristics of the successful online facilitator, as well as course management issues.

Reading for Module 2:

- Strategies for Effective Use of Chat
  http://www.onlinelearning.net/InstructorCommunity/tips_sep2000.html

- The Interplay of Content and Community in Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication: Virtual Communication in a Graduate Seminar
  http://www.cjlt.ca/content/vol28.2/schwier_balbar.html

- ONLINE CHAT SESSIONS! CHAOS OR....?
  http://168.144.129.112/Articles/Online%20Chat%20Sessions--Chaos%20or....rtf

- The Impacts of Text-based CMC on Online Social Presence
  http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/archives/2002/fall/06/index.html

- Managing the Synchronous Blend
  http://www.learningcircuits.org/2003/oct2003/hofmann.htm

Assignments for Module 2: (more specific directions will be given at the start of the module, when the link to module 2 shows on your navigation bar and the course module page.)

- Discussion Questions: Answer an assigned discussion question (150-300 words) and read/respond to at least two other students' posts.
- Best Practices Wiki: Add to wiki of best practices. Contribute one idea (or edit one existing idea) that discusses the pedagogical value of this week's featured tool in an online course.

- Planning Document: Submit a plan for a 20-30 minute text-based synchronous session with the fundamental pedagogical rationales highlighted, a sample agenda and possible challenges needing troubleshooting.
- Attend the required synchronous session.
- Key Items: Reflect on the major principles and issues for this module and apply them to your specific work situation.

Module 3 - Voice-Based Chat

Topics:
In this module we will explore alternatives to the text chat by examining and experiencing voice chat. This modeule will require participants to download and install Skype in advance. Information can be found at http://www.skype.com We will discuss appropriate uses of this method of teaching, and we will identify characteristics of the successful online facilitator, as well as course management issues.

Reading for Module 3:

- Finding Your Voice Online: An Inquiry into the Use of Online Voice Applications in Higher Education
  http://www.elearn.wa.edu.au/kt/edition05/download/Coghlan.pdf

- Distance Learning and Synchronous Interaction
  http://tinyurl.com/5fb2u

- AUDIO/AUDIOCONFERENCING in Support of Distance Education
  http://www.col.org/Knowledge/ks_audioconferencing.htm#introduction

Assignments for Module 3: (more specific directions will be given at the start of the module, when the link to module 3 shows on your navigation bar and the course module page.)

- Discussion Questions: Answer an assigned discussion question (150-300 words) and read/respond to at least two other students' posts.
- Best Practices Wiki: Add to wiki of best practices. Contribute one idea (or edit one existing idea) that discusses the pedagogical value of this week's featured tool in an online course.
- Planning Document: Submit a plan for a 20-30 minute voice-based synchronous session with the fundamental pedagogical rationales highlighted, a sample agenda and possible challenges needing troubleshooting.
- Attend the required synchronous session.
- Key Items: Reflect on the major principles and issues for this module and apply them to your specific work situation.

Module 4 - Multi-modal Synchronous Presentation Tools

Topics:
In this final module we will experience one of the newer technologies that allow instructors to deliver real-time instruction with voice, graphics, text chat and sometimes video.

Readings for Module 4:

- View one of Jonathan's archived presentation on synchronous sessions available through Learning Times

- Elements of Group Interaction in a Real-Time Synchronous Online Learning-By-Doing Classroom Without F2F Participation
  http://web.archive.org/web/20020808000302/http://usdla.org/html/journal/APR02_Issue/article01.html

- Using Synchronous Communication for Online Social Constructivist Learning
  http://www.cade-aced2003.ca/conference_proceedings/Mercer.pdf

- Using Computer Mediated Communication in Learning and Teaching
  http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/cap/resources/eguides/cmc/cmclearning/

- The eClassroom used as a Teacher's Training Laboratory to Measure the Impact of Group Facilitation on Attending, Participation, Interaction, and Involvement.
  http://www.irrodl.org/content/v3.2/lns.html

Assignments for Module 4: (more specific directions will be given at the start of the module, when the link to module 4 shows on your navigation bar.)

- Discussion Questions: Answer an assigned discussion question (150-300 words) and read/respond to at least two other students' posts.
- Best Practices Wiki: Add to wiki of best practices. Contribute one idea (or edit one existing idea) that discusses the pedagogical value of this week's featured tool in an online course.
- Attend the required synchronous session.
- Practice using the tool by presenting a 5 minute segment in slides and audio for the class.
- Key Items: Reflect on the major principles and issues for this module and apply them to your specific work situation.

Course Wrap-Up