

## Guidelines for Synchronous Assignments

The purpose of scheduling a course as a W, or fully online, is to provide students with quality instruction that is convenient, flexible, and works with their schedules. The use of W courses also assists the departments, colleges, and the university as a whole since it does not require brick and mortar spaces, parking, etc., for its course delivery. In keeping with the spirit and intention of online course offerings, it may be best for instructors to identify activities that are asynchronous in nature. The Center for Distributed Learning recommends these best practices that are currently in use by some online faculty:

- Offer *several* dates and times to meet via Adobe Connect or via the Chat feature in Webcourses@UCF.

Faculty member provides three times students can attend a synchronous session and vary the date and/or time of day to fit various schedules. Often the requirement is that the student must attend 1 or 2 out of 3 sessions. Sessions are then recorded and available for all students to review. This is often used for orientation sessions, to review difficult materials or study for upcoming exams, or to provide a sense of connection in a synchronous manner.

**Example:** Study session for an upcoming exam in which students have an opportunity to ask questions and get clarification prior to exam.

- Even in asynchronous courses, the strategy of student choice can be used through *alternative* assignments, providing options that capture the essence of the learning objective of the original assignment. This approach is often used for students with disabilities who may not be able to complete the assignment as required.

**Example:** A student is required to attend a synchronous class meeting where a course concept will be discussed in detail. Student B cannot attend due to scheduling conflicts, so the instructor records the chat session. Student B must review the recorded session and complete a short essay about the content, perhaps based on a question prompt provided by the instructor.

- Use proctoring for some assignments.

W courses may have proctored exams, but there must be a place that will offer this service to the student in their geographical location if the instructor chooses to use it. The instructor may need to work with the student to identify a suitable location.

This same idea works well for programs that require internships that cannot be handled virtually. It becomes a joint effort on the part of the instructor and student to locate suitable environments in which these assignments can be completed.

Feedback from proctors or internship supervisors can be provided via e-mail, instant messaging (IM), other visual or auditory technologies, or in written form.

A Faculty Focus Article called, Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning Tools: 15 Strategies for Engaging Online Students Using Real-Time Chat, Threaded Discussions and Blogs, refers to “Nine Strategies for Using IM in Your Online Course”. It talks about offering group chats at different days and times, as well as tips for making the use of IM more beneficial for students.

Best practices to handle synchronous assignments in asynchronous environments include using alternative assignments, or flexible dates/times for the synchronous requirements.

For further information, instructors may wish to contact the following instructors who are currently using one or more of the above methods:

- Eleazar (Trey) Vasquez      Education      Chats and alternatives
- Glenda Gunter      Education      Adobe Connect