Getting Started with… **Videoconferencing**

Videoconferencing is a wonderful tool that allows you to enhance learning outcomes through in-class, virtual engagement with speakers, students, and alumnae in other physical, cultural and national spaces. Although having a guest lecturer in class, physically present, is wonderful, this option is not always feasible. When Ying Wang from Asian Studies taught her class on Chinese culture, she loved the idea of bringing in the featured opera singer the students had been studying. She did just that…through a skype visit. Eva Paus opened up the team-taught Global Challenges class to alumnae who wanted to audit the class virtually, using Adobe Connect. Many students reported that having alumnae submit comments during class enhanced their learning because they brought different perspectives to the discussions.

Some possible uses:

Conversational-cultural exchanges: Faculty in several language departments schedule chats with students in a university in a country of the target language. Students speak for part of the time in English, and for part of the time in the target language of the course. When interactions are structured around cultural practices, students learn more about each others' lives and perspectives. Students in Evgeny Dengub's Russian Studies class reported that they found the chance to interact with native speakers incredibly helpful to their learning of the language and that it encouraged them to learn more about their peers living in other parts of the world. Clearly, this technology can also be used with partners living right down the street, whether in urban Holyoke or rural Turners Falls. Cultural exchanges take place locally, regionally, and internationally.

Guest Lecture/Practitioner Visits: Videoconferencing is an effective way to bring a visitor into your class at a minimum cost, in terms of time, money, and environmental impact.

Real-World Audience: Just as you can bring a visitor into your class, you can also bring your class to a different location in the world. Just ask students in the class taught by Jon Western and Rogelio Minana what it was like to present their final projects to an expert at the State Department!

In 2011-2012, Eva Paus and Alex Wirth-Cauchon led a faculty seminar on the technology and pedagogy of tele-collaboration, so expertise exists across the campus. Contact your RIS liaison today, a fellow faculty member who has used this technique in his or her class, or Becky Packard (Teaching and Learning/Weissman Center) to learn more. Consider trying this approach in your course if you think opening up your classroom walls will help you to meet the learning goals for your students.

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Many resources exist to help faculty think about videoconferencing. To start, try:

- Tips for Teaching with Videoconference Systems
  http://libweb.uoregon.edu/inc/data/portland/broadcastteachingtips.pdf
- Faculty Guide to Teaching through Videoconferencing
  http://tlt.its.psu.edu/hot-team/2006/videoconferencing
- Your liaison
  https://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/liaisons