Podcasting as Asynchronous Learning

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As educators are forced to transition their courses to being online, they are facing a difficult choice—do I conduct class synchronously or not? While synchronous learning allows for joint-learning in real-time, asynchronous learning—learning that does not occur at a set time—can be more accommodating. Students with limited internet or computer access, irregular schedules, or who are struggling with secure housing may find synchronous learning difficult during this time. An asynchronous learning approach helps students during a crisis by allowing them to learn on their own time. But how can someone transition a course into an asynchronous format? Well, one relatively easy way is to record a podcast!

In the summer of 2019, Dr. Rene Rocha approached me with the idea of converting our co-taught online course to a podcast format. Here is a simplified list of considerations to get your podcast up and running:

PODCASTING AS PEDAGOGY

Ask yourself, "what kind of podcast do I want to learn from?" and attempt to create that as best you can. Try listening to podcasts you personally enjoy and getting a feel for your ideal format. Start with your syllabus and ask yourself: How do I usually teach? Lecture-based courses might transition easily to an audio format but be mindful that this might not be as engaging as you'd like. Walking students through the assigned

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material and highlighting questions you'd like them to respond to often works for more participation-heavy courses. No matter your structure, don't be afraid to pause while recording to give students time to process information. It often takes several episodes before we "find our groove" and trial and error are part of this process. Your confidence will improve as you record.

The quantity of recorded content is also important to consider when designing your podcast. Do not feel you need to record a podcast for every individual assigned reading. That would likely overwhelm you and your students. I typically record one podcast per course week, with all assigned material within that week broadly covered in that episode. If you want students to be able to revisit episodes to review material, longer episodes will make that difficult. Try to stick to podcast time conventions—usually about an hour total run time.

You also don't have to record all by yourself. Zoom, and most mainstream video calling services, allow for you to record and download the audio of your calls. Editing these calls into podcast episodes can be handy for educators who are co-teaching. This method can also be used for scheduled guest lectures. Choosing to plan conversations ahead of time while recording with others can help structure covering your content. Within our podcast, I posed pre-written questions that Dr. Rocha would then answer. This helped students experience a somewhat shared classroom experience even in asynchronous course. Throughout

the semester, we had several guests attend recordings who also followed this format. However, making your recording sessions with guests more improvisational can be more engaging. It's all a matter of personal choice!

THE BASICS OF RECORDING

Because podcasting is a purely audio format, you really only need two things: 1) something to record with and 2) something to edit with. Take stock of what you have and what you need. Most laptops come with an internal microphone, and there are numerous phone applications you can download that allow for recording. Create test audio and note what you need to be mindful of in the final product. Sound quality is far more important than the equipment. As long as you can hear yourself loud and clear, anything goes!

Editing requires a bit more thought, as there are lots of options with their own unique drawbacks. Windows Movie Maker is available on Mac and PC, but some dislike it for purely audio editing. Those with access to the Adobe Creative Cloud can use Adobe Audition, but it's fairly expensive to purchase on your own. Unfortunately, neither of these options are available for Linux users. I edit all my podcasts with Audacity, a free open-source software that is (relatively) fast to learn. Take time to figure out what will work best for your budget and learning curve. The simpler the process, the better!

ACCESSIBILITY & AVAILABILITY

Getting your podcast to students is dependent on individual resources and guidelines. At the University of Iowa, we can upload audio and generate transcriptions directly on our course pages. For others, there are a few different options online. YouTube allows for audio uploading and auto-generates transcripts, but it might be safer to produce your own transcript to upload with your podcast. Another option is Soundcloud, which is a free audio sharing site. However, they do not offer transcription services nor have a way for you to upload a transcript alongside your podcast. You would have to provide and distribute transcripts to students who need it independently, so keep this in mind while deciding. Try to find what works best for you and your students.

When you allow students to access your podcasts is also an important consideration. Your syllabus should contain listening expectations for students within the course, preferably with specific dates. Some educators might prefer a staggered release of content so that the class has a feeling of progression, but some might consider that less of an asynchronous approach. I typically upload all of my podcast episodes at the start of the course and allow students to access all of them from the get-go, allowing students who need to work ahead to do so. There is no right or wrong way, decide what works for you and your students.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Deciding how to convert one's course from a synchronous to asynchronous format is always a challenge. Keep in mind that as difficult of a time as this is for instructors, it is even more difficult for students. Taking a new approach towards learning might bring a bit more flexibility into you and your students' lives. Plus, you can record in your pajamas! That's a win-win! ∎

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Race, Immigration and Urban Politics Syllabus and Assignments
Andrea Benjamin, associate professor of African and African American studies, University of Oklahoma

Managing Time in the Online Classroom
Malliga Och, assistant professor in the Global Studies and Languages Department, Idaho State University

Using Virtual Gallery Walks to Build Community in the Online Classroom
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