

When the Internet Isn't Powerful Enough: Accessible Courses

One frequently-expressed concern among UNC faculty has been over their students' internet and technology access. Some students' internet may not be fast or powerful enough to sustain a connection during a synchronous video conference session. Perhaps several other family members are also trying to access the internet for video conferences or other online work. Family members might even be sharing electronic devices. We should be sensitive to these challenges. Although we cannot resolve all of our students' problems, we can be aware of some relatively simple solutions that we, or our students, can affect. Here are a few tips for making our students' (and perhaps even our own) internet and technology more accessible.

- Before classes begin (or before you must move online), conduct a survey of your students via Google Form, Survey Monkey, or similar. Ask questions such as:
 - Do you have access to high-speed internet?
 - Do you have access to an electronic device with internet capabilities?
 - Do you use cell data to access your internet?
 - Does your device have a webcam, microphone and speakers?
 - Do you have to share the device with others?
 - How comfortable are you using the technology? (perhaps on a scale of 1-5, or similar)
- If any of your students indicate that they have poor internet reception, advise them to procure a wifi cable that will plug directly into the modem. This cable will not draw internet bandwidth from other users, but it will offer a stronger internet connection to the person plugged directly into the modem with the cable. If your student has difficulty procuring a cable, the ITS department at your university may have access to loaner cables.
- Create asynchronous and on-demand opportunities for students who have trouble with their internet or cannot meet during regular class times.
 - Allow students to access recorded class sessions and lectures by video/audio
 - Offer asynchronous options for participation in class discussions, such as discussion boards or other kinds of reflection submitted via email or in an assignment in the LMS.
- Create exams that do not rely on sophisticated technology, such as proctoring software.
- Create alternatives to major project assignments that may not require as much internet research/work.