WebEx Meeting Center in Digital and Traditional Classrooms

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Introduction

Teaching in digital environments provides opportunities to connect to students in multiple locations, as well as to engage students outside of "traditional" face-to-face classroom experiences. Although ripe with potential, digital environments can also pose a challenge for faculty when creating and maintaining connection to students, as well as for students to engage each other. WebEx Meeting Center equips both faculty and students with tools to work together in digital classrooms. It also can be integrated into traditional classes when faculty and students need to meet outside of regular class instruction.

What is WebEx Meeting Center?

WebEx Meeting Center, part of the WebEx suite, is a virtual meeting room with both visual and audio conferencing capabilities. It can be used for a variety of digital meetings in an engaging way. Participants can upload and share materials, such as Word documents, as well as share a common whiteboard for collaborative work. It does not require a great amount of technical savvy for users, and comes with easy to follow tutorials for both faculty and students. Meetings and events can happen live and also be recorded for viewings later. Events can be live streamed and/or embedded in learning management systems (LMS) if users do not want content available outside of the

classroom environment. With a university subscription, both faculty and students can host meetings and invite participants to join. If integrated into a LMS, participants do not need individual links and can participate inside the LMS class space. Users also get a personal room to use for a variety of meetings that is available anytime. Faculty can host larger meetings, such as for an entire class. Student hosted meetings can have up to eight participants, making them more suitable for small group work and discussions. WebEx Meeting Center also can include users outside of the university, such as guest lecturers.

Host flexibility and adaptability is one of the most beneficial attributes WebEx Meeting Center. Hosts can opt to chat live in open conversation, or mute the mics of participants is he/she does not want to be interrupted. A student can click the "raise hand" icon to let the instructor know he or she has a question or would like to make a comment. The host can temporarily unmute the mic for the student or send a note to hold questions and comments until a later time. Comments can be posted for the entire group or be sent privately to participants. Hosts also have the option to divide the class into smaller breakout chatrooms for discussions and can return to the large group lecture format when desired. WebEx Meeting Center works well on a variety of devices, such as laptops, personal computers, tablets, and smartphones.

How Can I Get It?

With a university subscription, faculty, staff, and students do not have to pay an

additional fee to utilize WebEx Meeting. Additionally, this often comes with

technological support of university personnel to install and troubleshoot.

A subscription can also be purchased directly through WebEx.com. Current pricing for

hosts (as of June 2018) is $14.95/month for up to 8 participants, $19.95/month for up to

20 participants and $29.95/month for up to 200 participants. Currently, the service offers

a 30-day free trial. Hosts send invitation links to participants. Participants do not have to

pay to use the service.

How Can I Use It?

1. "Live" Synchronous Chats for Lectures and/or Question and Answer Discussion

   Sessions

   I often post lecturers, readings, and a variety of media files for students in the

   LMS. Some students still need to talk through the material with time to directly

   ask questions to the instructor. I schedule these sessions in 60-minute increments

   for students to join the meeting. I load the module's materials in to the meeting

   space before the students join, which helps me reference PowerPoint slides,

   readings, and assignments while the students ask questions. Both the students

   and I enjoy being able to see each other and the class materials simultaneously. If

   the session is recorded, it can be posted in the LMS for other students to watch

   later. (I ask students not to use smartphones to log into live chats since the

limited screen space can make it difficult to view multiple people and class materials simultaneously).

2. Digital Office Hours and Personal Conferences with Students

   WebEx Meeting Center can be used in a LMS while the instructor works on other parts of the class, making it a good tool for open digital office hours when students may "drop in" without an appointment. Inform students to speak or use the "raise hand" icon to alert you they are in the meeting. It also works well when students need to meet with you individually, usually to discuss feedback on an assignment. The student's assignment and the instructions can be uploaded into the meeting for both of you to view simultaneously while talking.

3. Student Presentations with a Small Audience

   Students can host their own meetings, which they can use to present their work. They can upload presentation materials, including clips with visual and audio components prior to starting their presentation. The small audience (up to 8 other participants) also reduces nervousness since the entire class will not be present. If the instructor is not available to view the presentation live, students have the option to record their presentation to grade later. This flexibility increases the students' time to work on projects and reduces strain on the instructor's schedule since students often prefer to work on class work in the evenings and/or during weekends.

4. Student Group Work and Projects

   Groups of students can also meet digitally to work on projects. The collaborative

   whiteboard allows them to work simultaneously in the same space. It also gives

   them the option to record the meeting for accountability reasons and/or if one

   group member loses data needed for the project. This also helps students keep

   track of their progress and build a sense of team connection and community.

5. Guest Lectures from Remote Locations

   Hosts can also invite people outside of the university to join a meeting with the

   university subscription option. Guest lecturers can upload their presentation

   materials and/or readings prior to the start of the meeting (either through early

   invitation or sharing theme early with the host). This makes the materials easier to

   view than an interpersonal face sharing application where a guest stands in front

   of his or her materials. The breakout discussion feature also helps make

   conversation/activities with students easier to moderate.

Conclusion

WebEx Meeting Center works well in both digital and traditional classroom

environments. Hosts can upload materials, moderate participation, and control who and

when others can contribute to the meeting. Its flexibility allows for multiple purposes,

including student-led work. The technological training and support that comes with the

university subscription reduces time faculty spend learning new electronic tools and

training students to use them.