eTools: Using Adobe Connect in the Classroom

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Introduction

As enrollment in both online courses and distance education programs is increasing, a gap exists between what students expect in the classroom and what instructors may be able to provide. It also can be hard to retain students' attention with competing demands for their attention from social media to work to other classes. The virtual classroom can capture the attention of students, however, by using new technological aids along with more traditional classroom methods to make learning more engaging for students. One means of doing this is through the use of Adobe Connect.

What is Adobe Connect?

The Adobe Connect Learning software enables instructors to host an online session where the presenter and participants are in multiple, different locations, which can be especially helpful when the class is a distance learning course or when some students are remote learners. With Adobe Connect, learning can take place across devices, including mobile devices. Instructors can share files and whiteboards, host resources, and offer engaging content delivery live and on-demand. Adobe Connect users have access to storage, unlimited training, and Voice over IP (VoIP).

How can I get Adobe Connect for use in the Classroom?

Those interested in purchasing Adobe Connect can go to the Adobe Connect website at http://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html and choose "Shop Now" on the top right of the screen. Site visitors will be directed to the Adobe Connect purchasing options, of which Adobe Connect Learning is an option. After selecting Adobe Connect Learning, users can select between the two subscription plans for organizations. While these are different plans, both allow organizations to conduct virtual classes with up to 200 participants. The monthly plan is $370/month while the annual plan is $3,500 (which is slightly less at approximately $292 per month). Adobe Connect also provides individuals access to one free product trial per year. This trial allows users to host up to 25 participants for 30 days. The free trial can be found at https://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect/trial.html or by selecting "Free Trial" from the top right of the screen and completing the contact information requested.

How can I use Adobe Connect in the Classroom?

Adobe Connect is a tool for creating and managing virtual classrooms. More specifically, Adobe Connect can be used to:

1. *present information*. Both instructors and students can present information in Adobe Connect. Adobe Connect enables audio and video to be one way or to include both presenter and participants. Instructors can present lectures to classes in real time, whereas distance learners can speak and present to the whole class electronically. Virtual

classroom sessions can be recorded and archived in content libraries for later reference as well.

2. *share information*. Presenters can share PowerPoint content quickly with Adobe Presenter. In addition, instructors and learners can share desktops and exchange texts. This use enables instructors to share presentation slides, notes, and images with students. Students can ask questions and receive real time feedback and share materials with instructors and peers alike. Additionally, instructors can share tutorials with students to assist in improved learning outcomes.

3. *manage courses*. Instructors can develop curricula and test-outs, manage enrollment, send notifications, and generate learner reports. Additionally, instructors and students can create breakout sessions for enhanced, interactive learning. Instructors can incorporate new ways of using traditional classroom tools, such as an online whiteboard, while also sharing files, measuring live learner participation, and monitoring student engagement.

4. *hold office hours or review sessions*. While the classroom environment is a synchronous one, Adobe Connect enables the instructor to create asynchronous meeting spaces as well. This meeting space is especially helpful for hosting review sessions, advising sessions, or holding online office hours. Adobe Connect enables instructors to share a variety of information with students from learner reports to course catalogs to class material that make the software as helpful offline as it is during

synchronous meetings.

5. *bring in guest speakers*. Geographic and financial constraints are two of the biggest challenges faced by instructors interested in bringing in guest speakers. However, with Adobe Connect, anyone with access to the Internet can enter the virtual classroom. Speakers can use the video and audio capabilities to present to the classroom while students either can use the text feature or appear on video to ask questions.

6. *publish across devices*. As online education continues to grow, it is important to reach students on the devices they use the most, such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Adobe Connect enables the publication of course material across these devices. Students who enter the virtual classroom via desktop can do so without downloading any software, as the classroom is accessible via a URL.

7. *create community*. The online learning environment can be isolating if steps are not taken to develop a sense of community in the virtual classroom. A program such as Adobe Connect enables diverse groups of students to interact despite being geographically separated and creates an opportunity for students to engage with different cultures and ideas, developing a sense of community with their classmates and peers.

Conclusion

It can take time to learn how to use Adobe Connect and all the features of the

program, but it is worthwhile to do so as Adobe Connect is a powerful tool that extends the traditional classroom into a successful virtual environment. While the establishment of the virtual classroom is a necessity of the new educational landscape, having the right tools for creating this classroom is essential for overcoming the challenges that online learning can present. Adobe Connect is a tool that offers instructors the opportunity to reach distance education and online learners in a meaningful way without compromising course material or learning objectives.