

# *Synchronous, Asynchronous, and Blended Learning at CSUSM*

## **Synchronous Learning**

**What is it?** Synchronous online learning is learning that takes place in real time with the instructor and students interacting at the same time. Using technology such as video conferencing, real-time chat, or virtual environments, students are able to engage in learning activities such as lectures, discussions or activities. In order to facilitate these lessons, students in the course need to be available at the regularly weekly time designated by the instructor/institution.

### **Examples:**

- Live webinars
- Video conferencing
- Virtual classrooms
- Instant messaging

### **Pros:**

- Synchronous approaches have many of the same interactive advantages of face to face classes.
- Provides the ability to facilitate engagement through real time interactions with students in formal and informal ways. This includes small formative assessments/check-ins.
- Allows for the facilitation of real time student-to-student interaction during activities and or discussions
- Instructors are able to modify lessons based on feedback and/or questions from students. Students can gain answers to questions in real time during these sessions.
- May prove to be a more effective way to convey complicated information for some instructors.

### **Cons:**

- Violates one of the key principles of distance learning, which is the flexibility to work at their own pace and at times most beneficial to their schedule
- Student's learning is restricted by the fixed time of the course.
- Requires a higher technological hurdle for students (microphone, camera, internet connection fast enough to handle the live feed).
- Research about attention spans of modern students indicates that block video lessons may be less effective than letting students work at their own pace by engaging in shorter pre-recorded video lessons

### **Why you should use it**

If you teach in a discipline where you feel that having real time interactions with students is crucial to their understanding of the material or assessment of learning outcomes, a synchronous approach could be beneficial. This might include courses that have dense material or where the assessment of learning is tied to specific demonstration of skills (performance, labs, speeches, language). This method is also beneficial as a method to mirror student engagement methods familiar to many instructors and provide opportunity for dynamic interaction in the classroom. This type of engagement can support overall student success as well as facilitate deeper discussion around dynamic issues.

### **Why you should not use it**

This should not be used because instructors think it is the only way they can envision teaching or because it would be "less work" to just deliver the same lecture you have prepared for their face to face class via video conferencing. Asynchronous distance learning is also able to deliver dynamic lessons and student interaction. While faculty might prefer synchronous, they should investigate beyond some of the negative stereotypes associated with asynchronous online learning. Synchronous learning has many benefits, but it is not as simple as turning on a camera to film yourself lecturing for 75 minutes. It will take time and energy to monitor student activity and questions, and make sure students are actively engaged. Also, given the uncertainty students will likely face surrounding access to technology, living arrangements, works schedules, and health; instructors need to decide if the benefits of these lessons outweigh the benefit of allowing students the flexibility to work at their own pace.

**Finals for Classes using Synchronous Learning** are automatically generated when an approved class meeting time is used. Finals times for synchronous classes are generated in the same way that has been historically done for face-to-face courses.

## Asynchronous Learning

**What is it?** An instruction model that offers lessons that provide students more independence and flexibility in their learning. This model is shifted from an instructor-based learning model to a learner-based model that provides students freedom of time and distance. Learning can take place independently, within smaller groups, or with the whole class, but those interactions happen in a more structured environment, such as discussion boards. This instruction model does not include set meeting days/times for the class, nor can it require students to meet at a set time during the semester

### Examples:

- Online courses
- Blogs
- Pre-recorded video lessons or webinars
- Online forums and discussion boards

### Pros

- Asynchronous approaches allow students to learn independent of time or location.
- Students can learn at a pace that works for their schedule and learning style. This includes engaging material in small chunks or watching portions of recorded lessons.
- The flexibility allows students with obligations that may vary from day to day, to work at times that do not conflict with other obligations.
- Lower technological barrier to entry. Successful learning is less likely to be hindered by access to technology (camera, microphone) and internet speed
- Fosters student agency through shifting to learner-based model

### Cons:

- The lack of real time engagement can cause less buy-in from students or feelings of detachment
- Students may become frustrated by having to wait to have questions answered or waiting for other students to respond during group activities.
- The learner-based model relies on students to motivate themselves to complete tasks and the lack of scheduled interaction may lead to procrastination and rushed work.

### Why you should use it

Given the current uncertainty students will likely face surrounding access to technology, living arrangements, work schedules, and health, this method will provide them with a flexible option to meet your learning outcomes. While asynchronous teaching is not without its challenges, many of the negative stereotypes surrounding it have been addressed over the last few decades. There are a huge number of innovative ways to teach students and assess students that more closely mirror how digital native students consume information and the types of tasks they will be asked to do in their careers. Some of the work done in distance learning courses can carry over to face-to-face courses in the future.

### Why you should not use it

This should not be done as a way to build a self-sustaining course that faculty will not need to spend a great deal of time administering. While one of the benefits of distance learning is the freedom of time and distance, this cannot come at the expense of interactions with students. Given the students we serve, a correspondence-style course with little to no interaction or engagement will be detrimental to their motivation and overall success.

**Finals for Classes using Asynchronous Learning** will NOT have a final automatically generated.

- Finals for asynchronous classes cannot be time specific, but a final exam **date** (the full 24 hours on that date) can be requested during schedule build and will show on the student's class schedule.
- If **only** a synchronous 2-hour final exam time is needed for an asynchronous class, it should be labeled as blended. Please notify your department chair during schedule build in October if this is desired. It requires a single synchronous class meeting, during an approved class meeting time. Having one synchronous class the week before finals is acceptable for generating a final exam time. The pre-final week class can be useful for going over the ground rules for the synchronous final exam in a course that was otherwise entirely asynchronous.

## Blended Learning

Faculty may consider blending these methods by building a foundation to take advantage of the asynchronous model and supplement those materials with some synchronous activities and lectures. This is an option that can work as long as faculty set clear expectations for students, communicate them well, and keep them consistent. Faculty who pick the blended option and do not meet for the full amount of allotted time need to be mindful that they are still meeting the credit hour policy. Faculty should be clear if the synchronous portions are mandatory: is this necessary to receive all points in the course and for student learning, or can students receive all knowledge and points through alternative assignments? Based on student feedback about the difficulty of scheduling their week (work schedule, familial obligations) in classes that had inconsistently scheduled or communicated synchronous sessions, it is important that synchronous sections are planned and communicated to students well in advance.

- | Pros   | Cons:  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Takes advantage of the flexibility of asynchronous with the social engagement benefits of synchronous courses.</li><li>• Synchronous meetings can set the table for asynchronous tasks, or asynchronous assignments can be discussed/presented in the synchronous section.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Having the students have to keep a section of time open for the entire semester while only utilizing that time sporadically can make it difficult for students to schedule work (which is why letting students know the meeting dates by the first day is so important)</li><li>• Potential for more confusion for students due to the blending of different modes of instructions from week to week</li><li>• Complicates the planning and communicating of credit hour expectations.</li></ul> |

CSUSM wants to make it as clear as possible for students about when they are required to attend synchronously, thus the following blended options now exist for scheduling classes in spring 2021.

**Blended Option 1:** Any set portion of the class uses synchronous instruction during [approved class meeting times](#) and the rest of the student learning is done asynchronously. For example, for a course that would regularly meet in-person 3 hours per week, faculty can choose to meet synchronously weekly, but for 2 hours or 1 hour per week. This is how it will appear in the Class Schedule:

Blended 1 Example	Day(s)	Start Time	End Time	Date Description	Start Date	End Date
Virtual Synchronous	M	1:00 PM	2:50 PM	Full Semester	1/25/2021	5/14/2021
Virtual Asynchronous		----- Blank-----		Full Semester	1/25/2021	5/14/2021

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**Blended Option 2:** The class can have 1-4 synchronous meeting dates. The meeting pattern need to be during [approved class meeting times](#) and will show in the class schedule when students register. This option gives faculty the ability to schedule set dates when students know they need to be available to meet, without having to reserve every week in the schedule for this purpose. The class also shows the rest of the student learning is done asynchronously:

<b>Blended 2 Example</b>	<b>Day(s)</b>	<b>Start Time</b>	<b>End Time</b>	<b>Date Description</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>
Virtual Synchronous	M	1:00 PM	2:50 PM	1st Meeting	1/25/2021	
Virtual Synchronous	M	1:00 PM	2:50 PM	2nd Meeting	2/1/2021	
Virtual Synchronous	M	1:00 PM	2:50 PM	3rd Meeting	4/19/2021	
Virtual Synchronous	M	1:00 PM	2:50 PM	Last Meeting	4/26/2021	
Virtual Asynchronous	----- <i>Leave Blank</i> -----			Full Semester	1/25/2021	5/14/2021

**Finals for Classes using Blended Learning** are automatically generated when an approved class meeting time is used, even if only for a single date during the semester. Finals times for blended classes are generated in the same way that has been historically done for face-to-face courses.

- A single synchronous class meeting, during an approved class meeting time, the week before finals is acceptable. Please notify your department chair during schedule build in October if this is desired. Even if the class time is abbreviated, it might be useful for going over the ground rules for the synchronous final exam in a course that was otherwise entirely asynchronous.