Using Online Video Conferencing and File Sharing to Run Multi-Institutional Seminars and to Bring Guest Speakers to the Classroom

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Multi-institutional seminars

Overview

• The Hamilton McGonigle Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and the Information Technology Services (ITS) at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y., the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, Mass., the University of New Hampshire in Durham, N.H., and the University of California in Los Angeles are partners in a multi-institutional seminar project.
• Participating sites use web conferencing for the seminars.
• The seminars are web meetings with expert presentations, small group discussions, and time for individual and group presentations.

Pre-class preparation - off line

• Gives students a chance to interact with professionals
• Busy/famous people are more than happy to give an overview
• Pre-class preparation
• Class meetings

Class preparation

• Students are assigned to teams and are introduced to the sites of other teams, including the scheduled dates for each team's seminar.
• Students are shown the presentation in this document and asked to familiarize themselves with the details of the seminar.

Making it work

Classroom set-up

• The room includes a computer with a large monitor, a small flat-screen monitor to run the presentation, a microphone, and a high-quality noise-canceling microphone with a stand for capturing the voices of the participants.
• A computer with a standard projection screen.
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Discussion

• The seminar participants view the presentation in this document as a discussion.
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Audio

• Problem: the speaker's voice is weak because the microphones on the ceiling are not used.
• Solution: record the audio output and input at each site.

Choice of web conferencing platform

• Skype/Google Hangouts
• WebEx

Presentations

• The presenter's voice is weak because the microphone on the ceiling is not used.
• Solution: record the audio output and input at each site.

Video

• Problem: the connection between the seminar site and the other sites is not stable.
• Solution: use a computer with a standard projection screen.

Recording

• Problem: the video is not recorded.
• Solution: use a computer with a standard projection screen.

Best general advice: don't reinvent the wheel

In advance and back-up plans are critical.

• On the day of the session, have people sign in about 15 minutes early so that you'll have on-hand facilitators.
• Test all aspects of the system at all sites.
• Check especially for audio feedback issues.
• Make notes on the conferencing platform you've chosen.

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