



Saint Mary's
University
OF MINNESOTA

Guidelines for Synchronous Sessions in
Fully Online Courses

Policy /Guidelines/ Procedure Owner: Academic Affairs

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Saint Mary's offers online courses and programs that allow flexibility for students learning on their own without having to be in a particular place at a given time. Fully-online, asynchronous courses are responsive to students' busy schedules while including student-instructor engagement opportunities. Synchronous activities/meetings in fully-online courses between students and faculty in online courses also contribute to creating communities of learners, improving effective communication, and advancing learning.

The following list includes examples of synchronous activities that a program or department may consider necessary for student learning in an online course.

1. Course introduction:
 - a. Syllabus review
 - b. Student introductions to establish cohesion and enhance online communication
2. Information/guidance:
 - a. deliver program or course orientation or operational information
 - b. address student questions and provide group feedback
 - c. review sessions (of previously introduced content for an exam or to discuss the outcome of exams)
 - d. explain problem sets
 - e. hold individual student-faculty conferences
3. Office hours:
 - a. established and posted times that are set by faculty to connect live with students and discuss topics related to the course or their program
4. Clinical practicum seminar led by the faculty with a pedagogical purpose:
 - a. entirety of seminar
 - b. sub-group sessions
5. Small group projects that require students to coordinate meetings with each other
6. Learning activities that require synchronous engagement and/or peer learning:
 - a. simulations and role plays
 - b. assessment and evaluations of clinical skills

c. Performances, rehearsals, or presentations

If synchronous activity is required to meet student learning goals, synchronous sessions should:

1. Have a stated purpose with an activity that is meaningful and useful to the student;
2. Be constructed as part of the course and included in the syllabus (Synchronous sessions should not be spontaneous.);
3. Last between 15 and 90 minutes;
4. Last under 30 minutes if a lecture or delivery of new content;
5. Be judiciously implemented throughout the term;
6. Be conducted using courseware and technology on which instructors are trained and which is made known to students in advance;
7. Be scheduled prior to the start of the course with the dates announced in the syllabus, in the LMS for the course, and in the course offering schedule;
8. Be recorded with the recordings posted for students who cannot attend (All students must be informed that sessions will be recorded.);
9. Not have points associated with the activity unless the program has pedagogical reasons for the activity to require formal evaluation, such as an assessment of clinical skills, performance, or presentation.

If faculty determine that synchronous sessions that are not originally noted on the syllabus are necessary, then the faculty should schedule the ungraded synchronous sessions at times convenient for most students.

Students should be informed of the required synchronous activities as soon as possible (before the start of the course, if possible).

If the program includes participation in the synchronous activity as a necessary program component (e.g., a synchronous seminar accompanying clinical practica), the program catalog must note the inclusion of synchronous sessions so prospective students are aware of all expectations.