Virtual Office Hours

Updated: March 10, 2020

If your class moves online due to COVID-19, you may want to set Virtual Office Hours for your students so you can address their questions or concerns about the requirements of your course, and any changes you may implement to move your course online.

How to Set-up & Communicate Virtual Office Hours

1. **Availability**. Determine the best time to hold virtual office hours every week based on your availability. For example, Tues-Thurs 2-4 pm CST.
2. **Technology.** Determine your preferred mode of communication (email, phone) as well as your preferred technology for meeting virtually (**Google Hangouts**, **Skype**, **WebEx**, **Zoom,** etc.).
   - Some instructors don't mind sharing their cellphone numbers with students. If this is not an option for you, you can set up a free Google Voice Number to receive phone calls from your students.
   - For holding virtual meetings, you can use the platform you already have access to and are familiar with, such as Skype, WebEx, Zoom, etc. Or, you can use the freely available Google Meet/Google Hangouts to schedule online meetings. You can visit meet.google.com to schedule a meeting right away (you will need a Google account).
3. **Scheduling.** Determine how you want students to schedule a virtual meeting with you. Some options:
   - You can have students email or call you to set up a virtual meeting, and then hold the meeting at the designated time with the student, or
   - You can ask ALL your students to schedule a one-on-one virtual meeting with you, so you can check in with them, reassure them, and/or answer any questions or concerns, or
   - You can have open office hours, aka be present virtually in an online area like Google Hangouts or set up a Zoom meeting, and have multiple students join. Just like a group of students who would walk into your office.
   - Make sure you have **clear instructions and expectations for students** no matter which option you choose.
4. **Communication.** Communicate all details about your virtual office hours to students via various mediums:
   - **Update your Course Syllabus** to include your virtual office hours
   - Create an **Announcement via D2L**
   - Send an **Email via D2L** to all your students

Tips for Success

1. Make sure you **specify the time-zone** (CST, EST, etc.) for your virtual office hours so students in different time-zones know when to contact you.
2. **Give clear instructions and expectations** to students about how to schedule virtual office hours with you, including how to let you know if they can't make it.
3. **Be available and present** during your chosen virtual office hours. If you stay consistent and students know you are available during that time, it will reduce the chances of them expecting you to be available 24/7.
4. **Let students know your response time** if they contact you outside of your virtual office hours (e.g. "I will respond to all emails/calls within 24 hours. Please be patient.") This will reduce student stress and also allow you to respond in a timely manner.
5. Remember, **not all students may need or want to meet virtually**, so you can offer your students the option of meeting with them virtually ONLY IF they feel the need to communicate face-to-face. This will reduce your virtual meeting load and allow students who truly need help to meet with you.
6. **Set up a [Discussion Topic](#) for frequently asked questions (FAQs)**, this will reduce the time you will spend in your virtual meeting to answer the same questions/concerns for multiple students.