

## Instructor Guidelines: Asynchronous Option for Spring 2021

- All courses must provide students with an asynchronous option.
- What does the Asynchronous Option mean?

The Asynchronous Option exists for the instruction modes of Traditional, Blended, Flexible, and Remote modalities. Fully online courses are already asynchronous by definition. Asynchronous means that student participation does not happen at exactly the time scheduled for the class section in which the student is registered.

For example, students might be registered in a traditional section meeting on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 9am. If some students choose the asynchronous option, then they can complete exams, quizzes and assignments, watch lectures, and participate in exercises at different times than the scheduled class. An activity might be completed synchronously by some students during the Friday 9am class, but asynchronous students have the choice to complete it in advance or within some number of days afterward and still earn full credit.

- What does the Asynchronous Option mean for instruction?

The Asynchronous Option involves more than providing lectures that are recorded. All facets of the class must be available to the students asynchronously and not in a strict and narrow time frame.

Class discussion opportunities need to be offered using discussion boards or via some equivalent asynchronous modality as students may not be able to participate in real time sessions, especially if discussions are part of the course grade.

Online exams should not be restricted to a narrow time frame, but neither should they be open-ended with no time limit (the general recommendation is at least a 24-hour window of availability). Other assignments (papers, reports, etc.) should be submitted electronically (through eLearning) according to deadlines set in advance by the instructor.

- If students choose the Asynchronous Option, will their assignment deadlines be different?

No, even with the Asynchronous Option, asynchronous students still must adhere to the same deadlines and course timeline as everyone else from one week to the next.

Nevertheless, faculty need to understand that they cannot use attendance as a grading criterion for any student in the course, so as not to hold asynchronous students to different standards.

- If students choose the Asynchronous Option, is it self-paced (i.e., completing the course on their own timelines)?

The Asynchronous Option does not allow asynchronous students to complete the course and the requirements at their own pace or discretion. It only means that flexibility is built in so that they can complete the course with the same opportunities for learning and meet the same standards as the other students without having to participate on certain days and at certain times.

Asynchronous students need to meet the requirements and standards set forth by the instructor. They will also need to follow along at the same pace of the class even though they are not meeting at the exact time as the rest of the class. A common approach is to have all students complete the same assignments and activities within each week.

- How does a student choose the Asynchronous Option?

Students who plan to participate via asynchronous access will need to notify their professors through their UT Dallas email accounts, once the Fall 2020 term begins on **Monday, August 17, 2020**. Instructors also may choose to tell students that no special notice is necessary if the instructor prefers not to keep track of which students are following the synchronous or asynchronous course timing.

- Can students choose the Asynchronous Option after the start of the semester? Also, can students who chose the Asynchronous Option initially, decide, later on, to switch to the class instruction mode?

Yes, students who initially chose the instruction mode offered for the class can, at a later date, switch to the Asynchronous Option. Similarly, those who choose the asynchronous option can change to the regular class instruction mode at a later date. Students need to communicate and coordinate any change in their choices with the instructor through their UT Dallas email accounts. The communication should occur as soon as the choice is made.

- How should an instructor plan for the Asynchronous Option?

The general recommendation is to plan first as if all students are completing the course asynchronously. For most instructors, it is easier to shift from asynchronous design to synchronous than the other way around. Instructors also need to be prepared to pivot to fully (or at least more so) asynchronous instruction should health conditions necessitate it.

One way to prepare is to decide on the course objectives for each week of class. Plan for what students will do to learn (e.g., read, watch lecture or other videos, solve problem sets, engage in written or oral discussions), how students will interact with the material, the instructor, and each other, and what students will submit to demonstrate their learning. Then, set a deadline

for when students will be accountable for these activities each week. If you know you will always be grading on Fridays, for example, you might set the weekly deadline as 10pm Thursdays. Once you have decided how the Asynchronous Option will be implemented, any synchronous sessions or activities can be adapted to ensure common learning opportunities and standards.

- If instructors have more class/instruction questions regarding the Asynchronous Option, whom should they contact?

If instructors need further assistance, they should contact their Associate Dean or Program/Department Head for guidance.