



Supporting Remote Students Globally

Boston University

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Introduction

This document represents a collection of issues that the Office of Distance Education (ODE) has encountered over many years of delivering fully online degree programs. It provides some recommendations and pointers for instructors to consider when learners reside outside the United States of America and access content over the Internet.

This document addresses general issues to consider which address the goals of offering the same student experience and access to similar information and resources to all students, regardless of geographical location.

Known Issues

YouTube

Access to YouTube is blocked in some countries by the local government. Students may not be able to access YouTube videos that are embedded or hyperlinked in course materials, assignments, or announcements.

When planning your course, ideally aim to have all videos integrated in the required course materials by uploading them to [BU's instance of MyMedia](#) (powered by Kaltura) and checking that they are cleared in terms of usage rights. This is the most reliable way to ensure students around the globe have equal access – especially important now, during LfA and with a focus on inclusion.

When videos are added as supplemental materials, outside the core, things become more complex, but at the same time also easier in some aspects:

- From a usage rights point of view providing a link directly to a video at the original location and delivery medium (YouTube, Corporate) requires no consideration of usage rights, however,
- It becomes more difficult to ensure that the content remains available, because the owners of the videos may remove access and
- It is more challenging to provide equal access to students in countries where YouTube is blocked.

A possible solution to address the drawbacks is to provide alternative materials or assignments to students who are unable to view the videos. Providing materials in varying modes of representation (visual, auditory, written etc.) when planning the course, would be ideal.

- Furthermore, instructors can work with the BU libraries to [search](#) for alternative or supplemental media. [Subject specialists](#) can assist faculty with searching the library databases for suitable materials. The library has access to movies via Kanopy and other services and may be able to make them available to be streamed within a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Blackboard Learn or Sakai, or via the library catalog.
- In some cases, where alternative media to YouTube content cannot be provided, faculty have organized “Watch Parties” for students unable to access the videos. In a Zoom meeting the

instructor shares their screen, playing the YouTube video, using the [appropriate screen sharing option](#) in Zoom (optimized for video and audio).

Virtual Private Network (VPN)

Using the BU VPN from outside the US can result in slow connection and data transfer rates. Some students have reported that they are unable to connect to the VPN, which could be due to network traffic, lowered network speed, or system issues with the student's device. Connecting to the VPN does not guarantee the student will be able to access all websites, or materials.

Third Party Vendor Web Sites

Third party vendors services and websites may be blocked by the local government/authorities or have limited connectivity. For example, ODE works with a proctoring vendor, Examity, and their site works for some students in the Peoples Republic of China, but others in the country have reported being unable to authenticate (login) to the proctoring site. As a work around, ODE has used Zoom meetings, where the student shares their webcam and desktop, with local staff as a proctor, to allow the student to take the exam.

Bandwidth/Internet Connectivity Issues

Most BU sites and services, including Blackboard and library resources, are globally reachable, but Zoom connectivity can be unpredictable, especially with bandwidth constraints and when webcam and screen sharing is being used.

Students may only be able to connect to one or two services or sites online at a time to ensure they don't lose connection.

Google and Affiliates, Office 365

In certain countries, like the Peoples Republic of China, technology owned or provided by Google, like the GSuite for Education (Gmail, Google Sheets, Google Drive, Google Classroom), YouTube, Google Photos and others, are blocked.

We also have had reports of Microsoft Office 365 being blocked in certain countries.

Textbooks

When considering required textbooks, we note that the pandemic has slowed down international shipping considerably. Students outside the US may encounter shipping delays with textbooks or may be unable to receive any delivery at all. We recommend providing the course booklist to students as early as possible and to consider, when available, using books that have an eBook option.

Other Tips

Time zone

Be aware of your students' location. Consult a [time zone converter](#) to help with scheduling meetings and exam appointments.

Consider offering more than a single window of time for office hours to allow all students globally to attend. The local time zone also may have impact on when students will read, reply to, or send emails.

Setting clear expectations for due dates

When writing the syllabus and publishing due dates always include the date and time zone as a helpful reminder to students who are not in Boston. For example: September 8, 2020 9:00 A.M. EDT (Eastern Daylight Time, Boston, MA). Please be aware that the daylight savings time changes happen during the spring and fall terms, as follows:

2020 EDT started (clock forward) Sunday, March 8, 2:00 am until Sunday, November 1, 2:00 am (clock backward). In 2021 EDT will begin Sunday, March 14, 2:00 am until Sunday, November 7, 2:00 am.

Group work & presentations

Consider differences in time zones if the course places students into groups or requires them to present live. Alternatives to live presentations can be a recorded presentation in Zoom that is posted to the LMS, which also allows other students to peer review and give feedback asynchronously.

General

Make sure students understand course requirements, including the technical expectations and requirements, such as additional software needed for the course. Discuss any accommodations before the drop period ends.

Flexibility

We recommend including a note in the course syllabus about informing you, the instructor, as soon as possible if a student runs into issues with connecting to course materials or resources.

Whenever possible, record Zoom meetings and make them available to students who were not able to connect due to technical challenges or time zone differences. See LfA guidelines for information about recording Zoom meetings.