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Getting Started with Distance Education Technology

This is an overview guide to installing, testing and getting started with the WebEx software on your laptop or desktop.

General

1. Make sure you have the right equipment and that it is all working. You will need a computer (preferably PC or Mac running Windows, Mac OSX or Linux). We strongly recommend a wired rather than a wireless connection for better stability. Most common browsers (e.g. Firefox, or Explorer) work fine.
2. You will need a working *noise-reduction* or *noise-cancelling* headset to hear/speak. You can buy one for about \$35 (we supply the professors with one). Web-cams are also required - plan on spending about \$70 (again, we supply one for professors). Install and test the software/hardware beforehand, and on the *same* machine you will be using for the class. Students should not use computer speakers and a microphone – you may set up a loud audio echo which will annoy everyone in the class. Professors will disconnect anyone who causes an echo. Professors can alternately use the Snowball microphone and external speakers. UNENE staff will provide help to professors and students to set them up and answer questions.
3. The attachment provides the details for working with WebEx. Please read this attachment carefully, and get familiarized with it. Also, well in advance of teaching or taking a course, professors and students should try to use WebEx, and make sure they resolve any issues.
4. Allow lots of time before the class starts for set-up. If you turn on your machine a few minutes before class time, you will have no time to fix problems and you will almost certainly not be ready in time. Typically start it up 30 minutes beforehand and leave it running - there is no need to turn it off waiting for the class to start.

For Students

5. Contact your professor and UNENE to inform them you will be taking the course via distance education. Do this at least a week in advance. You are *required* to attend at least one weekend session in person.
6. Lori will send you a *url* link to access the WebEx session before the class. You do not need a username or password. When you join the real class, please use your full name – professors may eject anyone they do not recognize. After a few minutes you should see a whiteboard with various controls on the top and right side. You should *first* set up your audio/video (Audio – Speaker/Microphone Audio Test) to make sure they are working correctly. Then test various controls. It may not be obvious how to do things and may have some difficulty deciding which miniature icons do what. Try them out. Press the “hand” icon if you want to ask a question or

use the Chat window on the lower left if you prefer texting.

7. The professor will have recorded the lectures if you want to review it, as long as there are students taking it by distance ed. Lori will provide the location of the recordings for you to access. Jumping around in the recorded lecture can be quite slow as the server software has to skip through a compressed video/audio stream – this is not something we can fix, so just be patient.
8. While in attendance of a distant education session with WebEx get into the habit to be on mute all the time, to avoid turning pages or other background noise to disturb the class. However, when you want to say something, remember first to depress the mute button.

For Professors

9. When a course is set up WebEx will generate an email to you with the *url* link to access the course session. You can identify the sender as messenger@webex.com and by the email subject: "Training session scheduled: UNENE UNXXX". Use this *url* link as an instructor, please click on the link within 30 minutes of the session start time." The *url* link will take you directly to UNENE course in WebEx, and recognizes your Moderator privileges. Please do not give this link to students or anyone else. You do not need a password. Don't use any other links, as either they won't work, or you'll appear to be someone else.
10. If you also teach a refresher, you may receive a *different* set of links from WebEx just for that.
11. You will need to test your setup. You should get help from the UNENE admin assistant, Lori Cole. On your request, a test will be organized by Lori and the Program Director before your first class. The Program Director may attend the WebEx tests, and the first class to ensure that the software and equipment is properly working.
12. If you feel that you need more advanced training in WebEx before the course, please feel free to contact McMaster University's Support and Resources for WebEx,
 - For support resources, please go to: <https://wiki.mcmaster.ca/webex/>
 - For any questions related to McMaster's instance of WebEx or to request an account (faculty/staff), please contact us at support.webconf@cll.mcmaster.ca
 - For technical support, especially after hours, please contact WebEx Technical Support at (866) 229-3239
13. You will need an SVGA port on your laptop (to connect to the overhead projector) and a standard Ethernet port (to connect to WebEx via the Internet). Do not use wireless. If your ultra-modern laptop does not have these ports, please bring adapters. Our speakers connect via mini-RCA plugs, and the Snowball microphone uses USB. The speaker-mike uses USB. Bluetooth devices need to be tested before the class.
14. To avoid issues where remote students can't hear clearly, please consider the following: If your lecturing style is to stay in one place at the podium or desk, the Snowball microphone gives excellent sound and the separate speakers allow the remote students to be heard by the class. If you like wandering around as you talk, please use a headset.
15. We also have two speaker-mikes – they are an alternative to, but not as good as, the Snowball microphone, so don't use them unless you have some compelling reason. They attach via USB. You can daisy-chain the two speaker-mikes (wire them in series) and place one near you and one in the middle of the class. Appendix B shows how to do that.
16. None of the devices will pick up questions asked by the live class, especially from the back of the room, so please always repeat them for your remote students. Similarly if you use a headset, you'll also have to repeat questions asked by the remote students for the benefit of the live class.

17. Ask your remote students to set up and test their equipment beforehand. If they are not ready, neither of you will have time to do so on the day of the class, and they will miss it. It is their responsibility to make sure their equipment is working.
18. At Durham college, we have a locker containing a Snowball microphone, two speaker-mikes, a headset, webcam, four-port USB hub, speakers, Ethernet cable, and other supplies you might need. Lori will give you the locker combination. That means you can leave them there after each class instead of taking them home and trying to return them to UNENE at the end of the course. To find the locker (there are hundreds there in no particular order): come into the main entrance and walk straight down the hall. When you come to the end, turn right and go through the glass doors into the machine shop. Turn right immediately, and right again, and you should see a bank of lockers on your right. Our locker is #592 at the floor level. Open it like the old school combination lock (turn clockwise several times before pausing at the first number; then turn anticlockwise *past* the second number until you get to it *again*; then turn clockwise to the third number and stop).
19. Step by step setup in the Whitby Lecture Hall (the order seems to matter!). The podium has a power outlet and Ethernet. There is a set of controls and a "smart podium".
 - a. First plug your laptop into the AC power outlet on the podium
 - b. Connect the SVGA cord from the podium into your laptop.
 - c. Connect the Ethernet cable from the podium to your laptop (in case that does not work, you can connect to one of the front desks using our long cable. The desk just to the left of the centre aisle works (your left, when facing the class)).
 - d. *Don't* connect the small audio cable.
 - e. Start up your laptop and make sure you have Internet access.
 - f. Push the main "Power" button on the control box on (your) left of the podium. This will also automatically lower the screen and turn on the projector.
 - g. Push the "RGB" button on the same control box.
 - h. Use the settings on your computer to select the main and remote displays (e.g. Function+F5, but it varies with your machine), so your desktop is shown on the room projector.
 - i. Now connect to WebEx as usual, using the link Lori sent you.
 - j. Run the Audio Setup Wizard each time to make sure your equipment is chosen correctly. Choose the option (toward the end of the wizard) to allow multiple speakers
20. Please don't use the wireless connection at Durham for Distance Ed. as the setup is complex and is inherently less stable.
21. You may want to use the Smart Podium (touch screen with pens) on the podium. This overcomes one of the major disadvantages of using WebEx, which is the inability to use a blackboard – since you can now sketch with a pen on the screen. However it's fiddly to set up. To use it, connect the USB cable on the podium to your laptop, and install drivers as per the instructions in Appendix A.
22. You need to load your presentation slides in WebEx – please refer to the attached WebEx tutorial on using WebEx.
23. It is a good idea to have your webcam on at the beginning of the course so the remote students can see you. You can turn it off after a short while. If you need to show movies, especially in

AVI or MPEG formats, chances are that the remote class won't see a thing due to bandwidth limitations, and you may kill the sound also. Instead put the movie on the course web page before the class, so that the remote students can download it and view their local version. Obviously if the material is protected, you need some administrative control of further distribution, as the students will have a local copy on their computer. Simple animations or QuickTime movies *may* work – best to test them first.

24. Students (not just ones who miss a class) will depend on you to record all lectures. Remember to click on the Recorder button before lecturing. You can also ask a student to remind you. If you forget, you can start recording manually using the “record” button. You may want to pause recording during lunch and coffee breaks, and to stop it when the class is over – but if you pause it, please remember to restart recording.
25. In the class, you may find it difficult to manage the both the remote students and the live class. One suggestion: ask one of the local students to keep an eye on WebEx so you don't miss a remote student trying to get your attention by “raising a hand” or through the chat window.
26. The sound can lag a bit (depending on the quality of the connection) - somewhat like an overseas phone call via satellite - delays can be up to a second. You'll need to pause for a few seconds if you are expecting a reply from the remote students, and to allow enough of a gap for questions. They may also prefer to use the chat window – see point above.
27. Most of us are used to drawing on the (real) blackboard. Of course your remote students can't see that, so if you do it a lot, you can use the Smart Podium. If your laptop has a touchscreen, you're home free, of course. If not, you can buy (or ask UNENE to loan you) a drawing tablet – e.g. Wacom. UNENE will reimburse you if you give it back to us at the end of the course. When you use it, the drawing appears on the WebEx whiteboard. It takes some getting used to but at least all your students can see it. We tried pointing the laptop webcam at the real blackboard in the class – it was visible remotely once and was illegible once, so we now suggest you don't do that.

When Things Go Wrong

28. If the projector won't work:
 - a. To make sure the problem is not with your computer, ask a student to test the projector with his/her computer.
 - b. If this fails (e.g. burnt-out projector bulb) you can ask the local students to log in to WebEx and follow along with you, using their own laptops.
29. If the Whitby Internet connection or the WebEx server fails: The remote students won't see anything and you will not be able to record the lecture. There is a free alternate recording software (BBFlashback Express – see <http://www.bbssoftware.co.uk/BBFlashBackExpress.aspx>) and you can install it on your laptop and use it as a backup to WebEx, so you can post the recording after the session. Some students use it personally to record the class audio, and it works fine. *Please make sure you have this installed as a backup before you teach your course.* You don't need to use it unless WebEx fails.
30. If your computer fails: you can usually ask a local student if you can borrow their machine for the lecture, and use his/her copy of the lecture notes, or the ones you have already posted on the UNENE web site.
31. If you need further help, particularly if internet access is inaccessible, the number that you can call when on campus is ext. 3333, then select Option 1. There is a phone at the room entrance. If you cannot get a hold of anyone in IT, call Melissa Leathley (Conference Services, Durham College/UOIT Residence & Conference Centre, 32 Commencement Drive, Oshawa, ON, L1G

8G3). Her cell phone is 289-685-1425.

32. You are welcome to call Dr. Nik Popov on his cell at 1-647-875-9694

33. Please let me know of any good ideas or problems that are not covered in this FAQ. The technology is somewhat fiddly, but for most of our remote students it is essential.

Appendix A – Drivers and Instructions for SmartPodium

See

<http://downloads01.smarttech.com/media/sitecore/en/support/product/smartnotebook/smartnotebooksoftware10windows/releasenotes/relnotesproductdrivers108v26aug11.pdf>

<http://downloads01.smarttech.com/media/services/quickreferences/pdf/english/using-the-smart-podium-id422w.pdf>

Appendix B – How to Daisy Chain the Speaker-Mikes

Here is how to connect the two USB speakers together so you can position one near you and the other one closer to the middle of the class.

Speaker 1: (the one connected to your computer):

Note the position of the little black plug. The black cord connects to speaker #2. The white USB cord connects to your computer USB.



Speaker 2 (the one further away).