Technology in Practice
Attend Anywhere: Leveraging Technology to Provide Student Choice

Roshelle L. Overton, MACCT
Accounting Chair & Full-Time Faculty
Central New Mexico Community College

What started as a classroom experiment at Central New Mexico Community College two and a half years ago has turned into a much-needed way of teaching in the "new world" we're living in today. While many colleges and universities are headed back to campus, providing multiple attendance options in an online or remote environment is key to student success.

The Attend Anywhere Model

The name Attend Anywhere may be new, but the idea behind the name has been around for many years. It is often called HyFlex, but Attend Anywhere (AA) better describes how a student can participate in one of these classes. Instructors have regularly scheduled class times during which they present their lecture in a traditional classroom designed with AA technology. They also log in online through their virtual classroom during those scheduled times and record their entire lecture. Then, the instructor will post the recorded lecture in the course shell after each class session. Students can choose to attend the face-to-face session, they can log in to the virtual classroom and watch the live lecture at the scheduled time, or they can watch the recorded lecture at a later date and time. Ultimately, students are able to attend from anywhere and can intermix these options throughout the term as their schedules permit. For instance, if a student prefers to attend in the classroom but has to schedule an emergency dentist appointment during class time, they can easily just watch the recorded lecture later that day. This allows students to stay on track when something unexpected comes up. Similarly, if a student prefers fully online courses, they now have the extra resource of the recorded lectures to help them progress through the class, which is highly unusual in a regular online course.

Course Design

Each AA course is designed as a fully online course, but taught as a face-to-face course. This way, students who cannot attend synchronously can still complete the course in a traditional online format and, as mentioned previously, have access to recorded lectures. Students attending online can chat and take part in classroom discussions, as well as ask the instructor questions in real time. Instructors still have weekly assignments as normal. They can even have in-class assignments, so long as they give everyone an equal opportunity to complete them by a specific due date. Students are given the option to complete exams in class or in a proctored setting, like the testing center. Because of pandemic regulations, instructors teaching AA classes have the ability to proctor their own exams utilizing the virtual classroom during the scheduled dates and times of the exam.

During synchronous lectures, instructors are able to choose the virtual classroom that best fits their needs. They create one classroom for students to log into, or they create separate links for each class session. Each session is recorded so it can be posted for the students to watch. It is also important that faculty let students know how to access the live class sessions, as well as the recorded lectures.

In AA's infancy stage, the instructor had to teach two identical sections of the same course (one fully online and one face-to-face), possibly having up to 60 students who could choose to attend in person. In subsequent phases of the AA project, our registration team stacked and cross-listed the course sections so each Attend Anywhere class had both an online component and a face-to-face component. Regardless of which option the students chose, they were combined into one AA class. The instructor only has to design and teach one AA class, even though there are technically two sections.

Technology

We originally created two technology-rich classrooms for Attend Anywhere classes. Each classroom included an 86-inch interactive display that acted as the "whiteboard" or projection screen. Instructors could use a stylus to write on the interactive display. They could easily make notes to a PowerPoint or document, and save their edits at the board without returning to the computer. A huddle cam conferencing camera and two drop mics were attached to the ceiling. The camera allowed for HD video recording of the whiteboard and anyone at the front of the room. A remote control could be used to move the camera to other whiteboards around the room. The drop mics were needed to capture the instructor

talking, as well as student questions from all corners of the room. A dual arm podium held two 24-inch Dell monitors for instructor use. This allowed the instructor to see a replica of whatever was on the interactive display, as well as a view of any other document that didn't need to be projected onto a screen. A third 43-inch computer monitor hung from the ceiling so instructors could monitor the online chat while at the front of the classroom.

After the first year of teaching in those classrooms, we learned that less is more. While we continue to use huddle cams, drop mics, and dual arm podiums with two instructor monitors, the interactive displays and confidence monitors will not be included in future. There are now 30 classrooms specifically designed to host AA classes, with at least one available at each of our seven campuses. We also added a designated recording room for recording additional videos outside of class time.

Perfect Timing

In the first pilot phase, we offered five or six Attend Anywhere classes each term. However, when the college decided to offer all fall 2020 courses in an online format, these AA courses were in high demand. Faculty wanted to find a way to connect with their students and offer them more flexibility while navigating their new work and life schedules. Obviously, the traditional, in-classroom sessions would not be a part of the picture in the fall, but students could still log in live online or watch the recorded lectures at a later time. Students were quick to register, knowing that they would have a live, direct connection to their instructors. This past fall we offered over 15 AA sections. Without the ability to quickly train more faculty to teach in this format, we were not able to scale up our AA offerings any higher in the fall. With the pandemic restrictions at the college, we also did not know what our access would look like to those specific AA classrooms. Over the course of the fall term, as well as into this spring, we have added an additional 25 AA classrooms. Training opportunities are available so faculty can learn how to operate the technology, and they are encouraged to utilize this new technology to enhance their course while the school remains in modified operations. As we begin allowing more students back to campus, the hope is to offer even more AA classes.

Lessons Learned

While we have expanded this program immensely since its inception, we have certainly learned a lot over the years. This teaching format is not just for our local residents and current students. Attend Anywhere is a way to reach out to rural areas in New Mexico and find a way for those students

to take classes that are held over three hours away, and still get the same education as someone who lives three minutes away.

The faculty need training—not only on the course format, but on the technology in the classrooms. There are multiple steps involved, from including the proper language on a syllabus, to turning on the equipment, to streaming, recording, and posting videos. Also, during the pandemic, we switched to a new Learning Management System. Most AA instructors were using Blackboard Collaborate; however, no longer having access to that platform, training had to be provided for other virtual classrooms like Webex, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams.

Faculty have learned that it can be difficult to have in-class group discussions in the AA format, as not all students are attending in the same way or at the same time. Group projects also need to be done outside of class hours. Due to pandemic restrictions, this is currently done in an online setting, but each group is able to make whatever arrangements work best for their members. Additionally, AA may not be the best choice for instructors who prefer not to have their lectures recorded. Since that is a large element of this format, faculty need to be comfortable being recorded and having their students' comments recorded as well.

Feedback

Faculty and student feedback has been obtained multiple times since the inception of Attend Anywhere. In a comparison of prior courses taught in a traditional format, faculty have found that student success rates have risen in all courses that have switched to the AA format. Most faculty have attributed this rise to students having that extra resource of a recorded lecture. Drop rates have gone down, because students have found the options of attendance more flexible than in traditional courses. Final exam scores have also increased in comparison to fully online, non-AA courses. Students can better focus their studying efforts when they have the instructor telling them what's important to know in each lesson. Faculty have also found that the ability to record their lectures helps out when they need to be absent from a class, or their class is canceled. They can stay on track in those instances by posting a recorded lecture and an out-of-class assignment.

Student feedback has been largely positive. They wish for more of their classes to be offered in the Attend Anywhere format. Many thought it was easier to navigate the textbook when they had instructor videos available each week. Students believe that they are better connected to the course material and the instructors when they have access to videos in an online class. Students also appreciated the ability to choose be-

tween attendance options, as many of them said they previously had to drop a class for getting sick.

Unfortunately, there are still students who do not want to spend their time watching a recorded lecture. These students want a regular online experience, which they still receive, but they are certainly missing out on the extra resource. Faculty are continually looking for engagement methods to get those students to watch the videos, which includes embedding questions in the videos, assigning a grade to watching the videos, or requiring video summaries.

Summary

The Attend Anywhere format is putting the attendance decision in students' hands. They can decide which method works best for them, and move between those options throughout the term depending on their needs. These courses allow students direct online access to their instructors in a time when in-person lectures are not permitted. They also provide easily accessible video recordings from each lecture to help better understand the course material. With proper training, faculty can design their courses to be delivered in this format and stay connected with their students until it is safe to return to the classroom. Even then, the traditional, in-person classroom becomes yet another option available for students to choose.