INSIDE BERKLEE COURSES
USE GOOGLE HANGOUTS TO HOLD ONLINE CLASS MEETINGS

One way to make direct contact with your students outside of class time, whether in an online, blended, or in-person class, is to hold virtual class meetings online using a web conferencing tool like Google Hangouts. Web conferencing goes by a number of names—virtual classroom, a web meeting, or a synchronous online session—but always, the purpose is the same: to interact with your students online, live.

WHAT TOOL DO WE USE ON CAMPUS?
Berklee faculty, students, and staff all have access to Google Hangouts through Gmail, Google Calendar and Google+ websites. Google Hangouts is an instant messaging and video chat platform developed by Google. It allows you to hold live video chats with up to 15 users at once.

WHAT BENEFITS CAN WEB CONFERENCING BRING TO YOUR CLASSROOM
Research nationwide as well as anecdotal experience at Berklee have proven that using web conferencing is very effective in supporting student learning. That is, it can:

• **Create community.** Web conferencing helps students get to know each other and build a community of learners.

• **Increase motivation.** Feeling connected to a community—to the instructor and other students—leads students to be more engaged with the course.

• **Allow students to show their interest and engagement.**

• **Enhance instruction.** You can use Google Hangouts to add more material to the course that doesn’t already exist in the online content. Particularly when teaching a course written by someone else, using a live tool like Hangouts allows you to share your own specialized knowledge, experience, and opinions on the content.

IN WHAT WAYS CAN I USE WEB CONFERENCING?

• **Host discussions on hot topics.** You can present a compelling question then lead students in a discussion online, just as you would in class. Or, you may use the session to work as a group to brainstorm an approach or a topic, developing a thesis statement, or potential sources for a research paper.

• **Provide additional course content via lecture and presentation.** You can prepare interactive lectures or even share your screen to run slide shows, show videos, discuss scores, or listen to and critique a piece of music as a group.
• **Explain existing course content.** A Google Hangout can be used for demonstrations, explanations, and clarifications of course concepts or performance techniques that are best demonstrated visually. And some students will understand instructions better if they can ask questions and get them answered in real time.

• **Hold open office hours.** Virtual office hours can be offered during a set time, on a regular basis, or they may be scheduled as online “drop-in” or by appointment. This allows you to clarify FAQ or more fully explain and emphasize class policies. You could even hold private virtual office hours for students who are unable to make your in-person office hours, to discuss issues that are individual to their learning.

• **Makeup work.** Some instructors on campus have used Google Hangouts effectively to make up for missed classes, such as snow days. Other faculty have used Google Hangouts to provide performance critique for students taking courses such as Conducting, in the Degree Completion program.

**HOW DO I SCHEDULE IT?**

• **How often?** Online instructors have found it helpful to hold one session a week to keep students actively engaged in the course.

• **How long?** 30-45 minutes can be an adequate length, but you may find that time flies and you will want to extend that, depending on your agenda.

• **How do I find a time that works for everyone?** You probably won’t; be flexible. Just pick a time and then offer recordings of the session to those who cannot attend. If you make the experience valuable, students will make an effort to be present at the live session. (You can use QuickTime or ScreenFlow to make a screen recording of the session. Contact Faculty Technology Services for more information.)

**Before the Session**

• **Notify your students.** Post it in your course, mention it in faculty announcements, and send followup reminders via Quick Mail, the messaging tool that’s built into Inside Berklee Courses.

• **Have an agenda.** Post an agenda on your course site at Inside Berklee Courses at least one day in advance. The agenda should be based partly on students’ needs.

• **Pick a hot topic.** Students will attend if you’re offering them something worth coming for. “The wise man doesn’t give the right answers, he poses the right questions.” -Claude Levi-Strauss

• **Post optional resources.** If students need a handout, a score or lead sheet, or any other supporting material, post it in the class site for use both before and after the live class session.

• **Post a link.** Using the Add Resources>URL tool in your ol.berklee.edu course site, you can post a direct link to the Hangout for students to access the session at the designated time. *(See Faculty Training Services video below.)*

• **Tell students what to do to prepare.** Preparation could include a combination of readings, watching online videos, listening to audio, and reporting on observations or projects.
• **Practice ahead of time.** You may choose to script your session from start to finish, but still be flexible to student needs. Invite a colleague or two to sit in on a practice session and provide feedback.

• **Be prepared for tech problems:** Technical issues with some participants are inevitable and may slow things down. Be sure you that you are comfortable dealing with technical difficulties, which might prevent some users from logging on during scheduled times. Faculty needing help with technical problems can call Training & Support at ext. 2238. Students in need of technical help can call the Student Computer Support Center at ext. 8800.

**During the Session**

• **Structure your session.** You may find it helpful to spend 10 minutes answering questions related to assignments, then devote the rest of the time to leading discussions based on a compelling question or lecturing and adding content that doesn’t exist in the written course content. Or, you might wish to demonstrate a specific musical technique.

• **Be prepared for some students choosing to participate without video.** When students log in to the Google Hangout, they can choose to participate with video, audio only, or text only.

• **Acknowledge student contributions.** As students verbally respond or type responses in the chat windows, comment as discussions evolve. For example, “Thanks Laura, You raise a key point about…. What do others think? Did you have the same reaction as Laura or did you interpret this in another way?” or “I am seeing a number of people who found… while others have suggested… What about …?” Encourage, redirect, paraphrase, and clarify as needed.

• **Engage participants immediately.** When setting up the Hangout session, you can share your screen to display a slide (as a “do now”) to get students engaged right away as soon as they log in. This directs them to begin posting their response to the Do Now in the chat window while they wait for class to start. [Here’s a YouTube video that will help you use “Screen Share” in Google Hangouts.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usy9JdW0HNI)

• **Continue to engage students** throughout the online session by asking them questions, rather than having them sit passively listening to you and watching you move through slides on your screen share. Successful web-based synchronous class meetings include comments, questions, and ideas from everyone present, to the extent possible. Always go down the list of all students in the meeting asking for questions or comment.

• **Pay attention to timing:** Open the Web meeting 15 minutes early to give everyone the chance to log in, and encourage students to do the same. Always start and stop the meeting on time.

• ** Maintain a Firm Hand:** It may become necessary to gently cut someone off in order to make sure that the agenda is covered and that everyone has the chance for input.

• **Consider allowing students to lead.** You can facilitate or you can hand the floor over to a student facilitator.
After the Session

- **Post follow-up tasks.** Use your Faculty Announcements tool to post follow-up tasks to be completed after the web session. For example, perhaps you can create a new discussion Forum and ask students to continue the conversation started during the Hangout session.

- **Post the recording.** You can make screen-cast recordings of each session and post them on the course site for those who could not attend. (See Faculty Technology Services for more support on that.)

- **Conduct a postmortem:** Always make time for a postmortem with the faculty and staff about what worked well and what did not, so adjustments can be made quickly for subsequent meetings.

**INTERESTED IN SETTING UP A GOOGLE HANGOUT FOR YOUR CLASS?**
For a video from Faculty Technology Services that will take you through the process, step by step: [http://fts.berklee.edu/hangouts](http://fts.berklee.edu/hangouts)