

East Asian Academy for New Liberal Arts

Leaning into asynchronous learning to optimize the experience for remote students.

It was early in 2020 when schools across Japan took swift action to keep their students and communities safe while maintaining the continuity of education amid a sprawling pandemic. East Asian Academy for New Liberal Arts (EAA), a leading research education program, made the tough decision to move its enrolled students to online learning for the entirety of the upcoming spring semester.

EAA faculty prepared to teach in a fully virtual environment using the university's existing digital learning technologies — their custom-built learning management system (LMS), Google Classroom, and their web conferencing platform, Zoom. With a number of platforms to choose from, EAA professors had the flexibility to use their preferred technologies for communicating virtually with students, sharing digital course materials, and leading live synchronous class sessions online.

As the spring semester began at EAA, faculty soon acknowledged that their web conferencing systems didn't provide the full range of capabilities they needed to effectively teach online. Determined to deliver the best possible learning experience for their remote students, educators at EAA teamed up to find a solution that would enable on-demand video streaming and open up new opportunities to leverage asynchronous teaching and learning in the virtual classroom.

The challenge:

Blending Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

Shortly after moving courses online, it became clear that replicating pedagogies meant for in-person learning over synchronous web conferencing systems like Zoom was not going to be as successful as they had hoped.



About East Asian Academy for New Liberal Arts

The East Asian Academy for New Liberal Arts is a joint research and education program organized collaboratively by the University of Tokyo and Peking University. The program goal is to establish a completely new platform for research and education by making the most of the academic resources at both universities, and to create a new model of higher education and research for the future.

Two faculty members with EAA found a different type of video technology that could add much-needed flexibility to teaching and learning throughout the pandemic — and in the future — which could improve student engagement and outcomes.

Professor Ching Yuen Cheung recalled his experience while he was teaching at Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2019. “I recorded my lectures with Panopto for those who were on strike,” Cheung explained. “Later, I learned that some of my students actually preferred watching on-demand lectures in Panopto to attending live lectures on Zoom.”

Once again faced with the challenge of moving in-person classes to online learning, Cheung sought to apply his previous experience and deliver learning online through a blend of synchronous and asynchronous mediums. “While Zoom is best for face-to-face interactions and discussions, Panopto is really the ideal platform for teaching and learning,” Cheung said. “My students learn better when they can watch Panopto content on their own and then participate in live discussions over Zoom.”

Mark Roberts, a Project Research Fellow at EAA, was teaching a media studies course at EAA when it was announced classes would be held exclusively online for the spring semester. Under normal circumstances, he would have asked his students to go to the campus media center where media resources for their assignments were readily available, but that wasn’t possible with the pandemic. Roberts needed a way for his students to stream course media remotely.

Roberts typically flipped his classroom to maximize time for discussions and to guide students to think critically about the media they had watched for homework. “Many aspects of learning involve students listening, watching, and then thinking about the media or pre-recorded course content,” said Roberts. “In a remote learning environment, Zoom is useful for synchronous teaching that involves student interaction, but not for recording and sharing on-demand videos with students.”

The solution:

Making the Case for Asynchronous Video

Cheung and Roberts approached Ishii to discuss the immediate need for a solution that would make it possible for EAA faculty to blend synchronous and asynchronous teaching online. They believed that with Panopto, faculty could more easily experiment with different pedagogies to better engage remote students and optimize the learning experience.



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— **Ching Yuen Cheung**, Associate Professor, EAA

Having heard about Panopto from a colleague, who was using it at another university in the United States, Roberts believed it could solve not only the challenges he was facing teaching his media studies course online, but also it could provide a more effective and comfortable environment for students during the pandemic. So when Roberts discovered that Professor Cheung had used Panopto previously, they worked to collaborate with EAA’s Deputy Director, Tsuyoshi Ishii, to pilot the technology.

“We felt that the flipped classroom model would be more effective for online learning and would minimize stress for students during the pandemic,” Roberts explained.

In parallel, Ishii was facing the challenge of organizing a joint course in collaboration with Peking University. From his standpoint, an important part of EAA’s mission has been to explore new methods of international education and research, and plans had been made for faculty and students to once again travel between Tokyo and Beijing in autumn 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, made this nearly impossible.

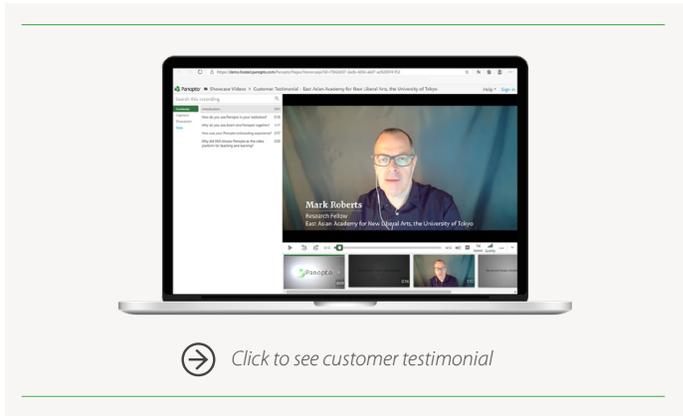
Ishii agreed with Cheung and Roberts that EAA needed video technology that would better support asynchronous teaching and learning — he also realized that Panopto could help make it possible to hold the joint course with Peking University, in spite of the pandemic. Using a flipped classroom format and on-demand video features of Panopto, students and faculty in different parts of East Asia, working in different time zones, could still meet on a weekly basis for academic exchange. Ishii also saw the potential to leverage on-demand video in new ways that would move EAA forward as a top humanities research center post-pandemic.

With broader goals in mind, they knew they needed four key capabilities:

- Online tools for creating and editing video content
- Reliable video streaming on-demand
- Secure video hosting and sophisticated user permissioning
- Support for broadcasting and streaming academic presentations online

The team compared Panopto’s capabilities with other platforms, including YouTube, Vimeo, and Google Classroom — only Panopto could meet each of their requirements. “I was surprised to learn that Google Classroom doesn’t have real video support,” Roberts said.

Confident they had found the right solution, the EAA team prepared to deploy Panopto for the fall semester.



The results: Innovative Teaching and Learning That’s Future-Proof

Praise for Panopto spread quickly at EAA, piquing the interest of faculty members outside of EAA. Professors already spent a significant amount of their time preparing to teach, so having access to tools that made it easier to create content and pre-record lectures made a big impact.

“For teachers, Panopto actually helps reduce some of the stress of teaching online,” Roberts said. “It’s easy to get started and easy to compose content — my colleagues and I have found that the learning curve is very manageable — it just works.”

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— **Mark Roberts**, *Research Fellow, EAA*

“While we can pre-record with Zoom, Panopto is clearly the stronger solution for teaching and learning,” Roberts said. Ishii added, “Panopto allows us to present each visual component separately so students can extract information quickly, in a very straightforward way, and even control what they want to see.”

For Professor Cheung and others who teach students internationally, Panopto is essential for providing the best, most consistent learning experience to students who are spread across different time zones. “I’m so happy to have Panopto at EAA!” Cheung said.

While it was the pandemic that initially compelled them to adopt Panopto, EAA faculty members plan to continue using the platform for asynchronous and blended learning, even when they are back in the classroom. “Panopto provides useful tools that make it easier for students to learn in any learning environment,” said Roberts.

Leaders at EAA have big ideas for evolving the business of education, as well. For example, the university is interested in using Panopto to record and stream campus events as well as video clips that promote its educational programs with the goal of engaging and attracting a broader audience of prospective students online. And as a leading research institution, EAA sees opportunities to push intellectual progress forward through MOOC-style talk sessions and recorded dialogues between scholars on opposite sides of the globe.

While no one is quite sure what the new normal will look like when the pandemic subsides, university leaders are prepared to use what they’ve learned throughout this experience to navigate an uncertain future. They are certain about one thing though — Panopto will be essential for developing innovative new forms of education and research that will make EAA successful in the future.