

Distance Learning : Student Presentations in PPR MA Modules

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Overview of Project

This Project relates to on-line, distance learning and the ability of students to post audio enabled presentations to their appropriate modules. The Politics, Philosophy and Religion Department (PPR Department) offer a number of distance learning modules as part of an on-line MA course. The students come from diverse backgrounds and differing time zones which necessitate a flexible learning environment. In the absence of any physical interactions and with time zone limitations on real time collaboration, the distance learning modules are structured to create a sense on on-line community through postings, peer to peer reviews, and supervisor interaction.

One other important element of the PPR distance learning programme is the posting of individual student PowerPoint presentations to Moodle. PowerPoint presentations with audio and create the opportunity for a more personal interaction. Other students are expected to view one another's presentations and post appropriate comments. In this way the postings of presentations seek to replicate the interaction associated standard (non-distance) seminars encouraging interaction and learning.

The intention of this Project is to explore ways in which the distance learning presentation process could be enhanced by comparing different online presentation approaches. Cost, practicality and ease of use will be critical considerations. A review of past student experience will be conducted to identify strengths and weaknesses of the current approach in respect of ease of use.

Once having identified possible appropriate approaches, final recommendations will be reached as to the appropriate way forward. As a short-term solution the Project will seek create resources and guides for making and uploading online presentations place the guide on the PPR Distance Learning Hub page.

It is hoped this Project will assist other Departments currently running or interested in creating distance learning programmes.

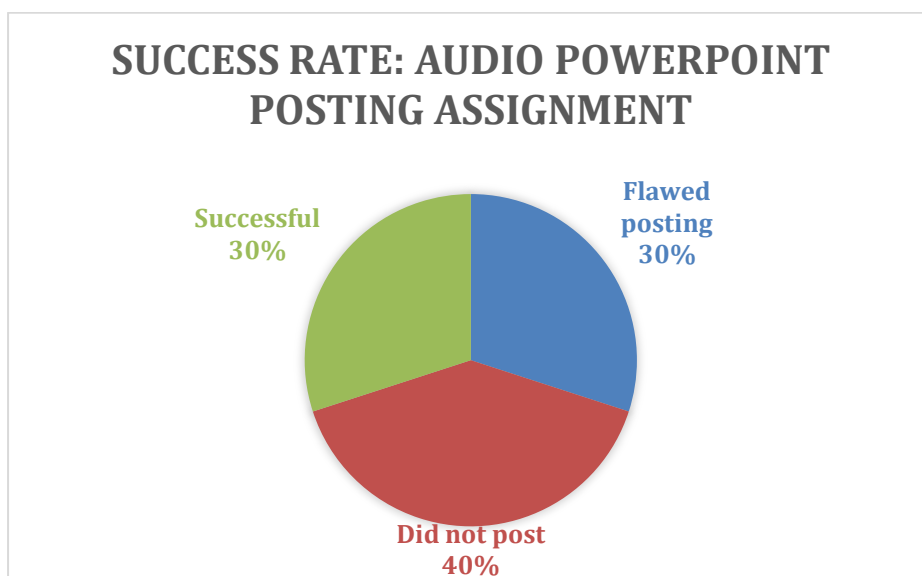
Background Research

Posting Presentations to Moodle

To determine the impact and nature of the issues faced by students attempting to produce an audio/video PowerPoint presentation, one distance learning module was selected from 2014. The results of the student's attempts to post a fully-

functional presentation was interrogated. In each case the student had left remarks explaining how and why they had experienced problems.

Of the twenty-one module participants, one had ceased participating fully and was eliminated. Of the remaining twenty active students, only six managed to post a fully functional presentation. Faced with various problems, others either did not post, or posted with problems/shortfalls such as posting narration only (no PowerPoint at all), a standard PowerPoint without narration, or totally separate audio and visual presentations. Sometimes the end results were not accessible to certain other students or not fully functional (e.g. the audio did not work, the screen was blank etc.)

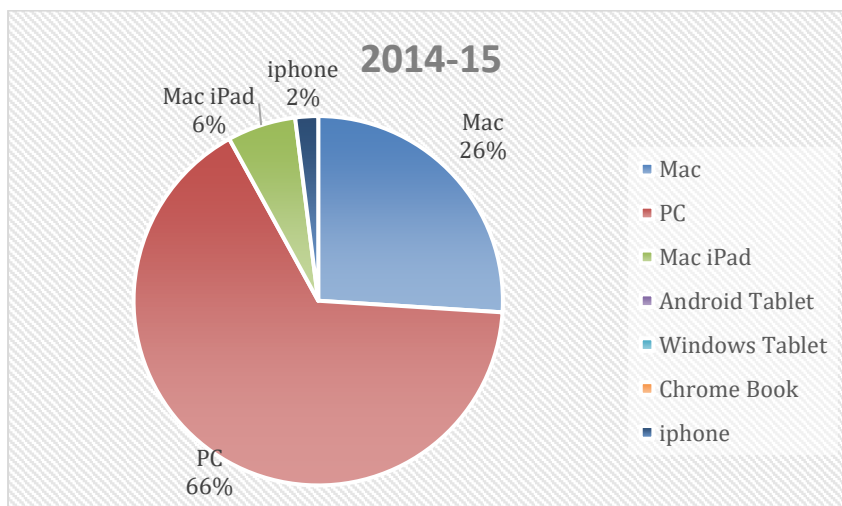
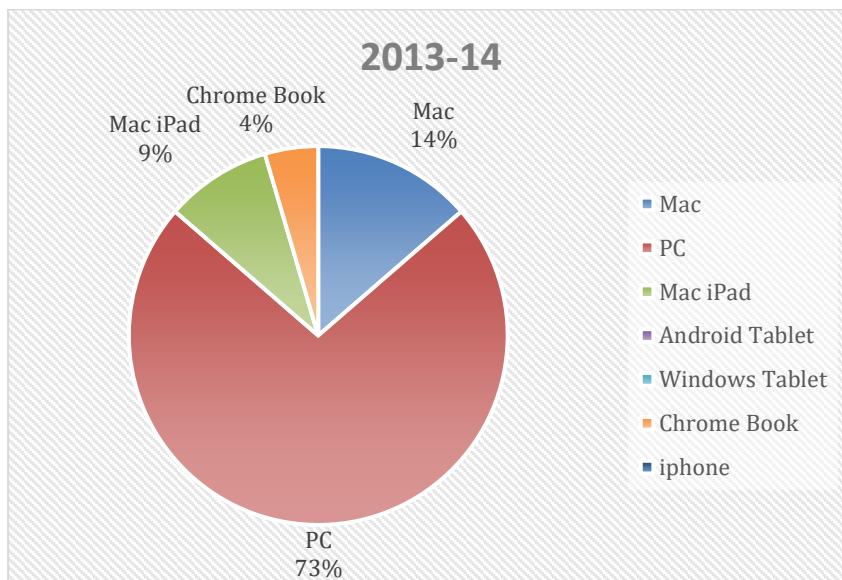


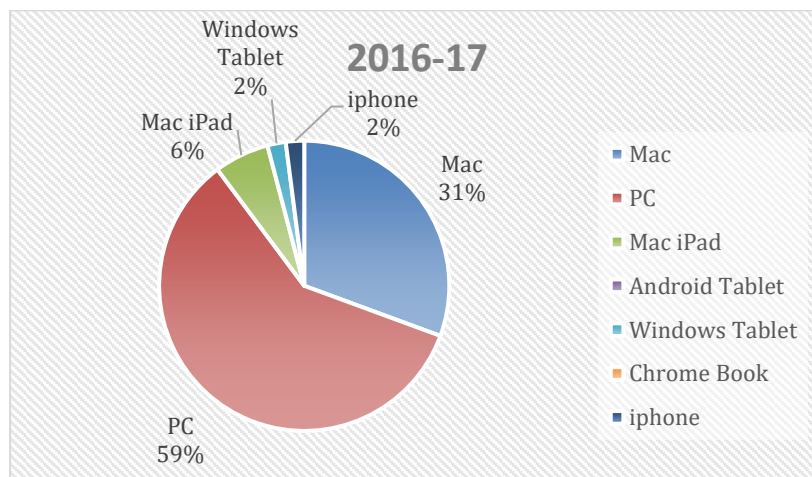
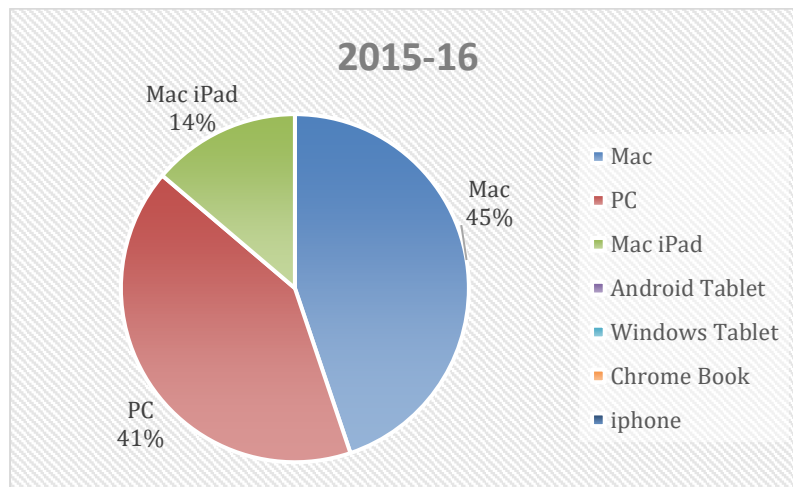
Various reasons were cited by student's by way of explanation. These included technical issues with PowerPoint, the complexity of recording with PowerPoint, different presentational software (non-PowerPoint) and 'old' versions of PowerPoint (at the time of writing there are some eight versions of PowerPoint all with different audio record functionality). In turn these variances were further complicated by attempts to convert the presentation into a video rendering the end result either not viewable at all or only to those students with similar operating systems. The type of browser used did seem to be relevant to production difficulties, but are a factor when considering alternative solutions and are therefore included here..

At the start of each annual distance learning course, students are asked which devices/platforms and which browsers they would be using and the information recorded. Four years of data has been recorded and this was examined to establish the composition of both platform/device used by distance learning students.

Devices & Platforms

There has been a significant fluctuation in the devices and the consequent operating platforms in the four years. These are detailed below. The two dominant platforms are the PC based Windows and Mac operating systems. For those less familiar with operating systems, it is important to emphasise that 'mobile' devices such as phones and tablets utilize different operating systems to those utilized on 'standard' laptops and computers. As such PowerPoint will have different functionality on a mobile device and require a different skill set. The figures reveal students do use mobile devices to access the courses. For example the 'mobile' Mac iOS system utilized by iPhones and iPads is a small but significant element. Whilst the Chrome based tablet appears to have fallen out of favour, the Windows based Tablet appeared for the first time in 2016-17 and could grow in importance.



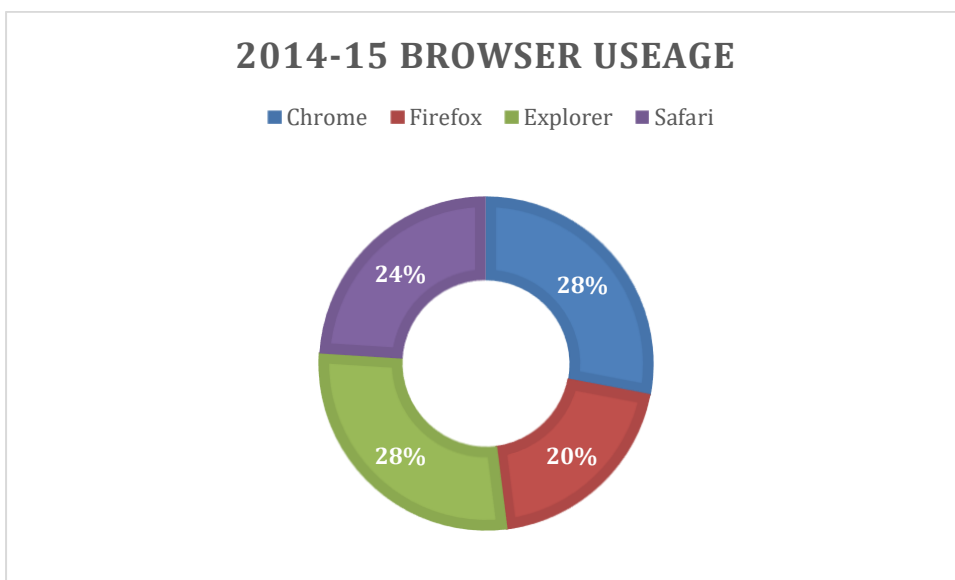
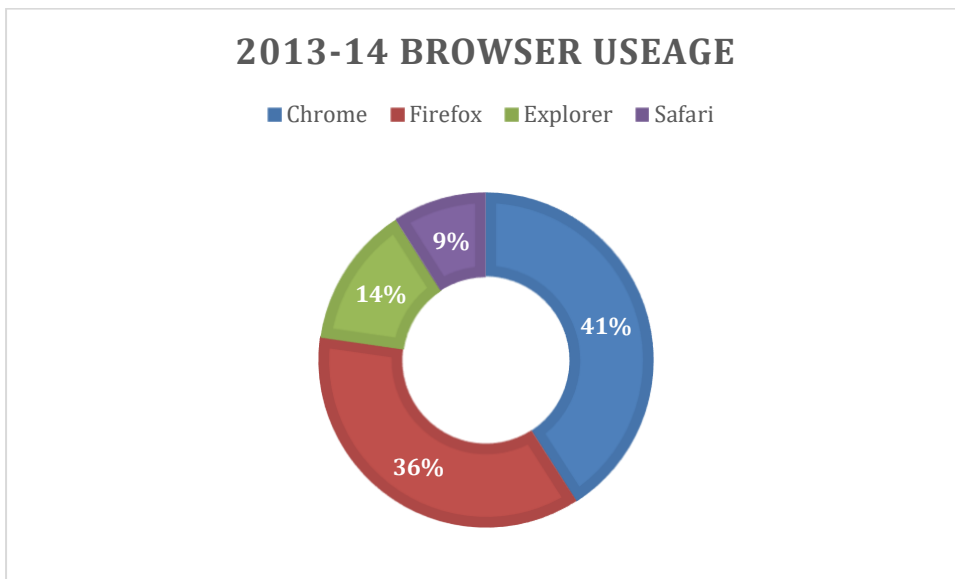


This mix of devices with an array of operating systems could change as manufacturers produce new devices with new features. Recently the boundaries between tablets and mobile phones have blurred following the introduction of larger screen sizes for phones. This might lead to a higher use of mobile phones for course work. The operating systems associated with mobile phones extends beyond the familiar Windows/Mac binary and includes both Android and Tizen for example. PowerPoint functionality varies enormously between these platforms.

Browsers

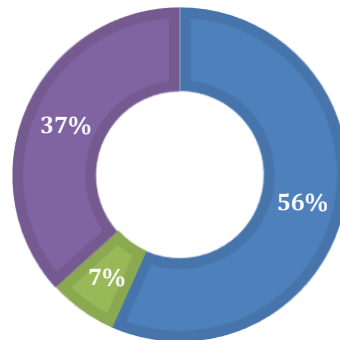
Although not a factor in determining the success or failure of student PowerPoint presentations, this data is included to facilitate in the appropriate choice of an

alternative solution. As with devices/platforms, the choice of browser has fluctuated over the four years. Chrome appears to be the dominant browser with strong showings from Safari (Mac) and a resurgence of Firefox.



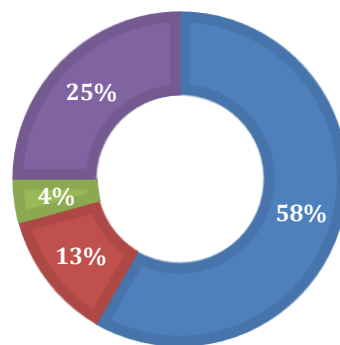
2015-16 BROWSER USEAGE

■ Chrome ■ Firefox ■ Explorer ■ Safari



2016-17 BROWSER USEAGE

■ Chrome ■ Firefox ■ Explorer ■ Safari



Solutions

It is important to stress that the issue is not the use of PowerPoint per se; most students appear capable of producing a 'standard' PowerPoint presentation. The problems occur when the attempt is made to either record a narration and/or convert the PowerPoint presentation into a video.

A temporary solution might be to require all students to use the latest Office 365 version of PowerPoint and provide training for that. This can only be a short-fix solution for two reasons. Firstly, PowerPoint is not fully functional on all platforms

and will not necessarily be capable of providing audio functionality. Secondly, PowerPoint itself is constantly evolving and not always in a positive way. It is subject to frequent 'updates' and 'fixes' on an almost weekly basis and functionality can be affected without any notice or comment (this has happened during the course of this project on two occasions).

The second point means that training and help material for students is likely to have a short shelf life. It may provide some immediate assistance. With this in mind, this project will provide some self-help solutions. A more satisfactory outcome requires a solution that is either a complete alternative to PowerPoint or facilitates the recording of a student presentation into one with audio features.

The short-term solutions and the alternative options are discussed in the next two sections.

Short term solutions.

To provide distance learners with some assistance in putting together PowerPoint Presentations, two approaches were used. Firstly, simple PDF help sheets were produced for the two dominant operating systems. Secondly, an on-line guide was produced using the Xerte system. Xerte is an open source learning resource developed for the educational sector and which Lancaster University supports and provides server space for projects. The self-help resource for PPR Distance Learning Students follows a 'decision-tree' process flow to guide the user to the information appropriate to their device/operating platform.

[\(https://xerte.lancaster.ac.uk/\)](https://xerte.lancaster.ac.uk/)

As stressed earlier, the self-help guides are not future-proof against updates, version changes, and the advent of new operating systems devices. It is therefore highly desirable that other options are explored and a longer term solution determined.

Longer term Options

A list of possible alternatives was compiled by internet searches, talking to colleagues and to ISS members. The alternatives were examined for their suitability by investigating their features and possible benefits.

The options investigated were:

- Kaltura
- Prezi
- Explain Everything
- Camtasia
- Planet e-Stream
- Panopto Student Assignment
- Google Slides

The key considerations as to an option's suitability were:

- Integrated audio/video functionality
- Ease of use (Student & Administrator)
- Existing support
- Cross platform
- Cross browser
- Licensing/Cost
- Compatibility/integration with Moodle
- Privacy
- Security

The results

Kaltura

Kaltura offers a 'Video Package' to students, teachers, and administrators of Moodle, "to easily create, upload, clip, manage, transcode, publish, and deliver high-quality video to any device."¹

However, it would appear that some academic institutions have experienced issues with Kaltura and decided to abandon it. Pittsburgh University deployed the Kaltura system in 2011 for the purpose of uploading lecturer and student media into their Blackboard system. Whilst it proved an effective, popular and intuitive means of uploading media by 2014 the University began to discover severe limitations which included updates which rendered existing media as unplayable, limited control over media once uploaded and an escalating price tag associated with the volume of hosted media. In 2014 Pittsburgh switched to Panopto.²

Around the same time Yale University experienced similar issues with Kaltura and instigated a detailed examination of server based platforms for video and media capture across the University.³ In August 2016, following a pilot scheme and evaluation, the Yale University Working Party recommended Panopto as the solution and proceeded with its use across the campus.⁴

In 2017, Indiana University produced a trouble-shooting guide to deal with on-going 'known-issues' which included incompatibility with Adobe Flash and a separate issues of playback for Chrome users when embedded code had been used for selected videos.⁵

Effectively Kaltura is a Panopto rival and there is little point adopting another platform which would require more expense, ISS support and new administrator skills. Given that universities in the US appear to have experienced problems with Kaltura, this is not a contender.

Prezi

Prezi describes itself as a 'conversational' presentation software offering a versatile 'non-static' storyboarding style that allows zoom and zoom out features. These features and the ability to embed other media allows the creation of visually enhanced presentations. The software is cross-platform.

There are a number of downsides. Firstly, there is a cost. A free version does exist but with limited memory and offers no privacy. A paid version incurs a monthly cost of \$4.95 per use, but offers greater memory and privacy.

The second issue is one shared with PowerPoint: there is no automated record facility. Although there are work-arounds, they create the very same learning obstacles students found difficult with PowerPoint⁶. Finally, trawling Moodle Helpdesk transcript threads reveals that a number of university administrators have experienced difficulties when to integrate a Prezi into Moodle. Whilst there are ways of overcoming these problems, it is not practical to implement these work-arounds for student introduced assignments⁷.

Prezi is in effect a feature-rich alternative PowerPoint which would necessitate extra training and technical work-arounds. Adoption would cause more problems than solutions.

Explain Everything

'Explain Everything' is a cloud-based solution which describes itself as an "interactive whiteboard and screen casting app." It provides users with the ability to create with voice narration with minimal demands on the user.

From an administrative point of view, there is likely to be issues .

There is a cost for the application, although this is minimal and based on the number of users. For example 50 users would be \$130 per annum.

Evaluating, Explain Everything on a short trial basis uncovered some issues such as PowerPoint and Keynote presentations not importing correctly. The Explain Everything Troubleshooting Guide recommends the fix is to convert the presentation to PDF and then reimport. Along this is a work-around, it speaks to an inherent glitch which requires time and effort to resolve.⁸

At present the sharing functionality is restricted to utilizing Gdrive for the majority of platforms with others 'Coming soon.' It works on iPads, Windows 8.1 and 10 devices, Chromebooks, and Android devices but does not work on MacOS at the time of writing.

The whiteboard approach is an interesting concept and the price is affordable. However, there are serious import problems and it does not work on MacOS platforms which rules it out.

Camtasia

Camtasia is a Video Editing Software currently supported by the Lancaster University. In addition to full suite of video editing/production capabilities, Camtasia offers screen capture functionality and could therefore record a PowerPoint presentation. This basic 'capture' function is simple to master, relying on a 'drag and drop' action to transform a PowerPoint presentation into a video. Any narration would be recorded over the newly created video. The training association with this would be minimal.

At the time of writing Camtasia works on Mac and Windows PC's but not on Android and Mac iOS⁹ Also, pricing is expensive as might be expected from this sophisticated software (currently \$249.00 but there would be a discount for education and a bulk license).

There are two downsides to Camtasia. The first would be licensing cost for a piece of software placed on a student's computer/device and would need to expire after the completion of their course. It is not clear how this might work in practice under a bulk license. Secondly, the adoption of Camtasia would be using a sledgehammer to crack a nut: the software is a very sophisticated editing suite which is reflected in its pricing. Using one minor aspect of its functionality would not represent value for money.

Planet e-Stream

Planet e-Stream aims to provide a unified video platform for educational institutions.¹⁰ As such it offers lecture capture and viewing of the live or saved video by students. The platform offers students the opportunity to create a personal area where they can upload their own content to supplement their learning process and this, together with other features makes Planet e-Stream an interesting concept.

It has a particular strength in facilitating live streaming and providing an efficient means for lecturers to direct students to relevant media via links embedded in Moodle. Whilst it is clearly possible for a student to create and upload a video of a PowerPoint Presentation to their 'space', there does not appear to be a method for allowing the sharing of video assignment exclusively with their fellow course students.¹¹

Aside from this issue Planet e-Stream cannot be a solution since to-date, the e-Stream Web Recorder is somewhat restrictive in terms of browser application and some platforms. It will work with Chrome (Version 52) which is the dominant platform of MA distance learners, but not the only browser. Secondly, the e-Stream recorder will not function with Mac iOS nor Android devices.¹²

Until Planet e-stream can address the incompatibility issues, it is not a contender. Planet e-Stream have successfully endeavored to extend the functionality of the software on other platforms in the past and there is reason to believe they may succeed in future with screen recording functionality.¹³

Panopto Student Assignment

Panopto is currently used by the University to record lectures. In addition to this functionality, the software is also capable of facilitating the sharing of student created video content. This can take the form student produced PowerPoint presentations which are converted to a video format prior to uploading to the appropriate Moodle Module. This is achieved by a cross-platform recorder which the student user downloads to their device.

The recorder is relatively simple to use, requiring the student to follow three basic steps which includes 'record' and 'upload' buttons to place the created video on the Lancaster Panopto server in the appropriate Module via a 'dropbox' process. The video presentation is then viewable by the lecturers and other participating module students. The 'rights' to allow a student to do this are created by the course administrator enabling a student 'assignment' folder within the relevant Moodle module.

Google slides

This item has been included because it came as a specific suggestion from the University. Google slides is a free alternative to PowerPoint. The basics are similar to PowerPoint so students would probably have little difficulty in mastering the technique of creating a presentation. Any presentations are hosted on the web and can be shared with named individuals.

The problem with Google Slides is pretty basic: it has no in-built audio/video record functionality. As such it does not offer a solution to the need to produce a presentation with audio content for consideration by other students on the Moodle module. There are some various 'hacks' available to turn a Google Slides presentation into a video, but these are laborious and unsatisfactory. Although hosting is secure, using Google resources does mean data is subject to ongoing analytic process by the Google Corporation which may be a consideration.

Google Slides do not possess the functionality to produce presentations with audio-visual content.

Recommendation

Since Panopto is cross-platform, uses existing software and is relatively easy to use, Panopto Student Assignments is likely to be the most practical solution. ISS support would be available and existing administrator familiarity would assist adoption. The existing Panopto suite appears to already contain the necessary functionality and it is therefore a case of merely utilizing the facility.

¹ <https://corp.kaltura.com/Products/Video-Applications/Kaltura-Video-Package-for-Moodle>

² <http://www.teaching.pitt.edu/blog/say-goodbye-to-kaltura/>

³ http://ctl.yale.edu/sites/default/files/basic-page-supplementary-materials-files/panopto_pilot_project_plan_-_final_draft.pdf

⁴ <https://www.panopto.com/about/news/yale-university-selects-panopto-for-campus-wide-video-content-management-and-capture/>

⁵ Known issues with Kaltura at IU, Indiana University.

<https://kb.iu.edu/d/acjm>

⁶ <https://www.apowersoft.com/convert-prezi-to-video.html>

⁷ <https://moodle.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=170191>

⁸ <https://explaineverything.com/support/faq/ios/>

⁹ There is a workaround for iOS if users have a Mac computer which they can 'mirror to.'

¹⁰ And increasingly, the commercial sector too

¹¹ <http://www.planetestream.co.uk/svp/benefits-student.aspx>

¹² https://videostream.swan.ac.uk/Help/Recording_WebRecorder.aspx

¹³ It is important to note, it is the web (video) recording functionality at issue here. Other function do work on Mac and Android such as live streaming and video upload.

Panopto Student Assignments – A Brief Outline

It is worth exploring in outline form the set-up of the Panopto Student Assignment functionality, if only to address any concerns that this represents a complex set of tasks. It does not. Panopto has the in-built functionality to create an 'Assignment Folder' (sometimes referred to as a 'Drop Box').

Under the current arrangements students on distance courses (or any courses) would not have access rights to any Panopto functionality associated with a given module. In other words, students could have been viewers of Panopto module content, rather than contributors. However, a change to the Panopto/Moodle set-up can create new access rights.

The intention would be to create an individual student subfolder or 'assignment folder,' unique to each student. The assignment folder is created by the Administrator with the module parent folder and serves to grant certain additional privileges to module participants. The purpose is to for each student 'viewer' to be enabled to both create and manage their own content. The parameters of the assignment folder privileges are such that the student can only see their own Assignment Folder until such time they choose to share it with other participants. The Assignment Folder's purpose is to allow distance learners to create and share presentations with one another and their teacher by utilising Panopto software. As such the recording functionality is multiplatform.

Distance learners download the Panopto recorder and utilise to record their PowerPoint presentation as a movie with narration. The finished presentation is uploaded to the Assignment Folder that sits within the relevant Moodle course.

Creating the Assignment Folder – How difficult for the Administrator?

The Assignment Folder is created by the Administrator and according to Panopto is a three point process.

<https://support.panopto.com/articles/Documentation/drop-box-student-recordings-0>

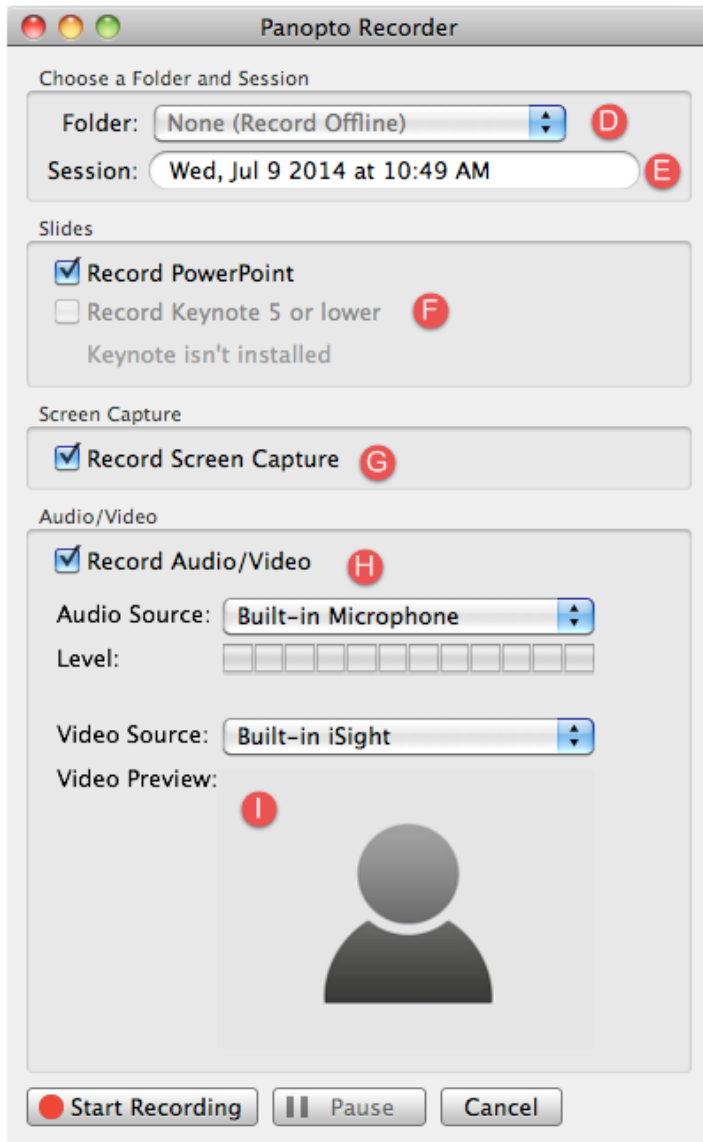
This ease of set-up appears to be confirmed by Universities using Panopto Distance Learning functionality. Here is an example of Haverford University using Panopto Assignment Folders with their Moodle courses for off campus student presentation recording.

<http://iits.haverford.edu/documents/create-a-drop-box-for-students-to-record-to-using-panopto/>

The screenshot shows the Haverford University website's Instructional & Information Technology Services page. At the top, there is a red navigation bar with the university name 'HAVERFORD' on the left, a search bar labeled 'Search IITS' in the center, and a dropdown menu labeled 'Everything' on the right. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'Instructional & Information Technology Services > Help Center > Documentation & Tutorials > Moodle > course management > Create a Drop Box'. A secondary navigation bar contains links for 'Home', 'About & Contacts', 'Help Center', 'Services', 'Instructional Technology', 'Public Computing', 'Software & Hardware', and 'Policy & Planning'. The main content area features a large banner image of a campus scene with the title 'Instructional & Information Technology Services' overlaid. Below the banner, the page title is 'Create a Drop Box folder so students can record with Panopto', followed by 'Print' and 'PDF' icons. The text explains that Panopto is used for faculty use but students can also use it to practice presentations. It notes that by default, only the creator and the teacher have access to view recordings, but this can be changed. The page concludes with instructions on how to create a Drop Box folder for a Moodle course. On the right side, there is a 'Related Content' sidebar with three links: 'Panopto (Lecture Capture)', 'Using Panopto Lecture Capture and Video in your Course', and 'Recording Presentations and Uploading to Panopto Drop Box (Instructions for Faculty)'.

Creating an audio PowerPoint- How difficult for the student?

It is very simple to use for the student. They choose what they want to capture (video, audio, and or PowerPoint etc.) and press a record button. It allows the student to capture themselves if they have a camera and so wish. See screen shot.



Once complete they press an upload button and it uploaded to the Assignment Folder in the appropriate Moodle course. See shot below.

Offline Recordings						
Start Time	Duration	Session	Streams	Actions		
1/13/2011 2:50 PM	00:01:09	Thursday, January 13, 2011 at 2:50:25 PM	Audio + Screen	Upload to Server	Delete	

Currently Uploading Recordings						
Start Time	Duration	Folder	Session	Streams	Upload Progress	Actions
2/17/2011 6:21 PM	00:00:03	my folder	Thursday, February 17, 2011 at 6:11:58 PM	PPT + Screen	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: green;"></div>	Pause Delete

Uploaded Recordings						
Start Time	Duration	Folder	Session	Actions	Status / Link	
2/17/2011 6:10 PM	00:01:07	my folder	Thursday, February 17, 2011 at 4:32:30 PM	Delete Local Set Offline	View	Edit Share (default)

Conclusion

The downside of Panopto distance learning functionality is that it requires an element of administrator set up time. However, the steps an Administrator must take to create an assignment folder are relatively straightforward. The student participant must be added as a viewer to the parent folder in which the assignment folder is to be created. In the parent settings, the 'Share' tab is activated and the name or email address of students are typed into 'Add People' section¹

Clicking on the 'Settings' tab gives the Administrator the option to "Allow viewers to see each other's sessions". This needs to be selected to allow other course participants to view one another's contributions.

There is also some comfort to be derived by the experience of other universities who have successfully extended their use of Panopto to include student assignments. There is little reason not to believe Lancaster University PPR could successfully utilize the function for its distance learning courses, thereby easing the course administrator's workload created by students grappling with audio/video problems created by the complexities of PowerPoint functionality/performance on different platforms and constant software updates.

Universities which use Panopto Student Assignment are:

University of South Wales
Imperial College London
University of Kent
University of Bath
Southampton University
Louisiana State University
Eastern Washington University
University of Washington
Hong Kong University
Bangor University

Bangor University state, "We've also begun to allow students to use Panopto to film their own assignments and submit to a tutor via Panopto's 'drop box' style functionality. This is definitely an increasing use case for the video platform and lots of academics are now asking for their students to be able to create recordings for assessment."¹

¹ <https://www.panopto.com/blog/how-and-why-bangor-university-uses-panopto/>

¹ <https://support.panopto.com/articles/Documentation/drop-box-student-recordings-0>
http://teach.southwales.ac.uk/panopto/student_recordings/

<http://iits.haverford.edu/documents/create-a-drop-box-for-students-to-record-to-using-panopto/>

<https://canvas.ewu.edu/courses/805988/pages/allow-students-to-record-and-share-panopto-sessions>

Conclusion

If MA distance learning students are to continue to be required to post PowerPoint presentation with audio then a robust solution is required. Relying on the inherent audio narration functionalities of PowerPoint is not an option: it is unreliable and inconsistent across different platforms. Moreover, it is subject to bugs and ongoing upgrades which can render help material out of date.

To overcome platform differences and functionality changes to PowerPoint the optimum solution is the tried and tested Panopto system. This would allow students to still utilize PowerPoint to produce a standard presentation, but utilize Panopto to record narration and produce a video version accessible by lecturer and fellow students alike. The system is supported by ISS and course administrators will not face an unfamiliar environment; the tools are an extension of the existing Panopto system they currently work with.

Panopto Student Assignment should be trialed with a couple of Distance Learning modules to determine viability and if successful implemented in each module which requires student presentations.