

# Report on Synchronous Distributed Course Modality

**Date:** April 6, 2026

**From:** Technology And Media Committee

The Technology And Media Committee was asked to review the “Synchronous Distributed Course” modality proposed by Provost Birdsell for Fall 2026 implementation post-merger. This modality would have students take the same course from the same instructor simultaneously in rooms on both Union and Jersey City campuses, with the instructor teaching in person on one campus while students on the other campus participate remotely via video conferencing.

## Committee Findings

The committee conducted a discussion exploring the proposal's technological aspects and evaluating its impact from the perspective of faculty members and their concerns about students' learning experience. While the benefits to the Kean community and the economies of scale of offering courses simultaneously across the two campuses are clear, these benefits are entirely contingent on the successful implementation of the conditions outlined below. The committee is not opposed to the development of this modality; however, its viability is contingent on the availability of the technological, infrastructural, and support conditions detailed in this report. Our committee currently has the following concerns about the university's ability to successfully implement the hybrid teaching modality as described within the proposed timeline. We enumerated our concerns and described the investments we anticipate being required to successfully implement hybrid teaching at Kean below.

## Technical Infrastructure Deficits

Equipment and Classroom Technology: Kean’s technological infrastructure currently does not support—and cannot reliably support within the proposed timeline—the implementation of the proposed modality. A key gap limiting the success of this endeavor is the lack of standardized audiovisual equipment across the Kean Union campus (and likely across the Kean Jersey City Campus as well, although this committee has received no information on the technological or media infrastructure of Kean JC). Based on currently available information, the committee is not aware of any classroom on the Union campus that would allow an instructor to simultaneously interact with and observe students in person and virtually in another classroom, while implementing modern pedagogical methods that Kean instructors are encouraged to use. Additionally, the logistics of how students in the off-site classroom are expected to interact with the instructor or simply interrupt a lecture to ask a brief clarifying question while the instructor is engaged in teaching are unclear. At other institutions where this paradigm is used successfully, the classrooms where these classes are taught are outfitted with specialized technology to address these issues. To this committee’s knowledge, few if any classrooms at Kean are currently outfitted for this purpose.

Human Resources and Support Staff: In addition to the missing capital equipment, the necessary human support infrastructure is also missing. The faculty senate has been made aware by this committee, the research technology working group, and the IT steering committee that the growth of IT resources and available expertise has not kept pace with the University's growth as it has achieved its R2 status goal. If this proposal is implemented without the necessary support, both faculty teaching and student learning will be negatively impacted. Additionally, attempting to implement hybrid teaching without hiring and training specialized IT personnel will further strain the University’s already strained IT resources.

Implementation Experience and Faculty Impact: Committee members with previous experience implementing similar modalities reported routine technical failures causing class delays and

cancellations for remote students, inability to use regular classrooms due to equipment deficiencies, significantly increased faculty workload requiring separate instructional approaches for remote and in-person students, and compromised educational quality with remote students unable to participate fully in classroom activities. If interruptions like this are not quickly resolved, they will inevitably negatively impact teaching quality, and, therefore, teaching evaluations and the faculty tenure and promotion process.

The largest share of extra effort required to teach these courses (particularly during the initial attempts) will fall primarily on faculty, without corresponding structural support or formal recognition in workload or evaluation processes.

## **Needs Analysis Requirements**

Many essential aspects of the proposed hybrid teaching modality are either unclear or have not been made available to this committee or the Senate. Essential questions remain unanswered, including:

- anticipated timeline and scale of hybrid course offerings
- general equipment and software requirements versus current availability
- classroom infrastructure needs and upgrade plans; staffing plans for technical support personnel
- training protocols for teaching assistants
- resource allocation across both campuses.

As an example, consider courses that involve students working along with professors on computers, paper, or art and design materials. How are the computer screens, papers, or other materials of multiple students at the distant classroom supposed to be viewed by the instructor? These elements have not been demonstrated to be in place, and without further information, the committee cannot reasonably assess feasibility during the proposed accelerated timeline.

While this committee's purview is narrowly focused on the media and technological aspects of the proposal, several members noted concerns that other university committees or groups should be consulted. For example, at a minimum, the Academic Standards & Policy Committee and the Distance Learning Committee should also be consulted. Additionally, there are likely aspects of this proposal that KFT should have the opportunity to comment on.

## **Committee Recommendations**

### **Primary Recommendation**

The Technology Committee strongly recommends that the Senate not approve the proposed Fall 2026 implementation timeline for Synchronous Distributed Course modality without the conditions outlined below being met, and require completion of a comprehensive needs analysis before any future consideration. However, we recognize that developing this teaching modality is important, if not essential, for the future of Kean University as we expand to include Kean Jersey City. In fact, it is precisely because the development of hybrid teaching is likely essential to our campuses that we are focused on what is required to successfully implement it as a new teaching modality.

Before any implementation timeline can be established, the administration must provide detailed responses to fundamental planning questions, including:

- Anticipated timeline and scale of hybrid course implementation
- Specific equipment, software, and classroom infrastructure requirements
- Current resource inventory versus implementation needs
- Staffing and technical support plans, including training protocols

- Budget allocation and resource distribution across campuses

We suspect that the earliest possible implementation date when those items are addressed is Fall 2027. This would allow a full year for infrastructure development and faculty preparation, ensuring the success of this new teaching modality. We know from instructors' experiences during the spring of 2020 that implementing distance-learning teaching modalities without addressing these concerns is a recipe for poor student performance and student-instructor burnout.

### **Recommended Pre-Implementation Conditions**

While it is no replacement for the needs analysis, if the Senate chooses to approve this modality as proposed, the technology and media committee recommends that the following issues be addressed before the fall of 2026:

**Infrastructure Development** - Complete standardization of audio-visual equipment across all intended classrooms - Establishment of dedicated real-time IT support during all sessions - Resolution of current platform reliability issues - Development of comprehensive technical support protocols and policies for dealing with connectivity issues before those issues arise.

**Faculty Support Systems** - Mandatory comprehensive training for all participating instructors - Formal recognition of increased faculty workload through appropriate compensation adjustment - Development of pedagogical best practices for maintaining educational quality across locations

**Governance and Policy Framework** - Formal integration into University course modality descriptors - Resolution of collective bargaining concerns - Implementation of quality assessment protocols - Completion of small-scale pilot program with volunteer faculty

### **Recommended Interim Solution**

If Kean requires some courses at the Union and Jersey City campuses to be combined into a single synchronous course as early as the Fall of 2026, then an Online (Synchronous) teaching modality should be considered for these courses. This approach has several advantages. First, it provides runway for the responsible implementation of the proposed hybrid course model throughout the 26/27 academic year. Secondly, it avoids the potential inequities and technical difficulties enumerated above caused by a second classroom of students using unfamiliar equipment—essentially, since all the students will be teleconferencing individually, there is only one student experience for the instructor to focus on, regardless of whether a Kean student is at Union or Jersey City. Finally, most instructors already have several semesters of experience with Online (Synchronous) instruction, having used this modality during the pandemic. Thus, instructors are already familiar with the limitations of this modality and can plan their courses with these challenges in mind.

### **Risk Assessment**

It is tempting to view the implementation of exciting new teaching modalities solely as an opportunity for Kean University to demonstrate our ability to adapt to the current challenges facing higher education and our excellence. And indeed, addressing the logistical challenges of co-teaching courses between the Union and Jersey City campuses is a profound opportunity for us to distinguish ourselves and become an industry leader in implementing this particular mode of distance education. However, this will likely not happen without the planning, forethought, and investment that this committee is recommending.

The significance of this endeavor is precisely why the risks must be carefully managed. And we should weigh the potential for rapid implementation of hybrid learning to succeed against the very real peril of that rushing brings. If implemented without the conditions outlined above, this modality is likely to result in compromised student learning, instructional disruption, increased faculty workload without

support, and downstream impacts on faculty evaluation and student experience. Additionally, Kean University could suffer long-term reputational damage if we were to become a cautionary tale. These risks must be considered and mitigated.

## **Conclusion/Summary**

Given the anticipated implementation timeline for hybrid courses, this report documents the conditions required for successful implementation and the risks associated with proceeding without them. While synchronous distributed learning may serve legitimate post-merger needs, successful implementation requires substantial preparation that cannot be completed by Fall 2026. The committee urges the Senate to prioritize educational excellence and faculty support by requiring comprehensive preparation before considering this modality. If it is an absolute necessity to offer some courses simultaneously at the Union or Jersey City campuses Fall 2026, then the currently approved Online (Synchronous) teaching modality should be explored as a possible short-term solution. Implementing this on a small scale would likely reveal the specific challenges that need to be addressed before adopting the proposed hybrid modality.