How to Update Your Syllabus for Remote Teaching

Step Zero. Determine How You Will All Interact

Some questions to consider about how you want your remote-instruction course to work:

- For the next few weeks, do you plan to hold real-time events with your students during your scheduled course times, or will you move to an asynchronous mode, with information, conversations, activities, and messages moving among everyone outside of real time—or a combination of both?
- Determine your highest priorities during this period. What activities should be re-scheduled or canceled all together?
- How will you include flexibility in your schedule to accommodate the transition to alternate-format delivery itself, too?

As you think about modifying your syllabus and schedule, focus on the interactions that your students will have with materials, each other, you, and people outside your course, and keep some general principles in mind:

**Keep your goals steady.** Don’t change your course’s learning outcomes, goals, or objectives. We must all still satisfy the U.S. Department of Education and accreditsor requirement that we maintain “regular and substantive interaction with students.” Modify grade-bearing activities and assignments, so long as the revised versions still meet the same learning outcomes.

**Be equitable to all students.** Changes made should not favor some students over others, and options provided should be available to all students. Also, avoid changes that would increase costs for students.

**Ask your students about obstacles.** As soon as possible, reach out to your students to determine the challenges and barriers that they face right now: focus on questions of time management and access to resources. Could they all attend live sessions during regularly-scheduled class periods now? What devices and service plans do they have for getting access to electronic environments and tools? Are their jobs on hold, their children now home from school?

Example: “[Surveying Students about Their Ability to Access Digital Learning Environments](#)”
Step 1. Only Connect

Review your existing syllabus for ways to connect and communicate. Think about whether you wish to give your personal contact information to students (or set up a Google Voice temporary number that forwards calls and texts to your actual mobile line).

For all details that need updating or adding, start a “syllabus updates” section of the document, in a box, right at the beginning of the file. Put the date that changes were made alongside any changes.

Example:

Remote-Teaching Syllabus Updates

Communication (last update March 23, 2020):

During remote instruction, we will hold live sessions during our regularly-scheduled class times, using Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. I will post the links to live sessions in our Canvas course environment ahead of time, and recordings will be posted as soon as possible after live sessions.

Live sessions will consist of a short lecture on the major ideas we will discuss, followed by an open Q&A or structured live discussion among the class.

Because remote instruction requires more flexibility on my part and yours, the best way to communicate with me is via the Canvas “Q&A” discussion forum | e-mail | text message | phone call. Of course, that’s not the only way to reach me. Here are all of the ways you can connect with me. My family is usually asleep between 10:00p and 7:30a Central time, so I will have my communication devices all turned off during those times. Go ahead and send your messages, though!

REPLACE THIS WITH A LIST OF YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION.

I have put together a spreadsheet where you can share your contact information. It’s located HERE. If you prefer not to share, that’s okay. If you’d like to share privately just to me, e-mail me your information and I’ll keep it in a private file.

A last word on communication: I will be using e-mail and the Canvas Announcements feature as my primary means of communicating with the entire class. Please be sure to check those methods on at least four days every week, including WEEKDAY when we will start each new unit.
**Step 2: Adjust Your Plans & Provide Access**

Tell your students how you will structure their weekly experience via remote teaching. Build on the existing schedule or calendar that is already associated with your syllabus and create a “typical week” of actions to take.

For every activity and interaction that you will ask students to do, provide instructions for how to use those tools (or link to such instructions).

Example:

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**Remote-Teaching Syllabus Updates**

*Our Schedule (last update March 23, 2020):*

In the coming weeks, your “typical schedule” for our course should include the following regular actions:

- Set aside at least 1 hour for studying, reading, and preparing for activities.
- Schedule 1.5 hours to a) attend our live session or b) watch the recording of the lecture portion of the live session and send comments and questions via the Canvas “Q&A” discussion forum or e-mail.
- Make at least 1.5 hours for demonstrating your skills (e.g., responding to assignments, taking quizzes and tests, engaging in lab simulations).
- Set aside time for seeking help and support, such as with our tutoring team, librarians, or DoIT help desk.

*Our Remote-Instruction Tools (last updated March 23, 2020)*

We will be using the following tools to support our remote-instruction interactions. Contact the DoIT help desk if you have trouble installing the needed files for any of these tools, and check out the Knowledge Base for answers to teach-tool issues.

- **Canvas:** The web address for our Canvas course environment is COPY URL FROM YOUR COURSE HOME PAGE.
- **Blackboard Collaborate Ultra:** I have set up a live environment in Bb Ultra at COPY URL AND PHONE BACKUP FROM BB ULTRA. We will meet during regularly scheduled course times. Be sure to download and test the software in advance of our meeting times.
- **LIST OTHER TECHNOLOGY TOOLS. PREFER SUPPORTED TOOLS, IF POSSIBLE.**
Step 3: Maintain Your Rigor without Turning into a Private Investigator

Review your classroom-based policies on attendance, late submissions, and academic-integrity limitations. Consider removing grades for attendance, relaxing prohibitions on late work, and trusting students to do their work under desired conditions for all activities and assessments that are not considered the major skill demonstrations in the course.

Example:

Remote-Teaching Syllabus Updates

Course Policy Update (last update March 23, 2020):

For our remote-instruction interactions, our course policies need to shift along with us.

Attendance: I will not track or assign grade weight to your attendance in the live parts of our course. I recognize that the measures we must all take in response to the COVID-19 situation will mean that some of us can and some cannot attend live sessions. It is still your responsibility to take an active part in our course: attend live sessions, watch recorded resources, ask questions and move our conversations forward in the discussion areas of our online environments. I will continue to give you feedback, assign grades for objective-related activities, and respond to questions and discussions via our Canvas learning environment.

Late work: Shifting from an in-person schedule to a largely online one will require us to shift our expectations about student work and grading feedback. Effective March 23, 2020, all work for each unit or week in our course will be due by 12:00n Central time on the following Monday (e.g., content and ideas for the week of March 23-27 will be due before noon on March 30). Due dates for major course projects, tests, and assessments will be updated in the course calendar on a rolling basis. If you know your work will be submitted after the deadline, please contact me as soon as possible to make arrangements. Late work submitted without arrangements or explanation will still be subject to late penalties at my discretion.

Academic Integrity: Our pivot to remote instruction means that it is more important than ever to follow the academic integrity standards for UW-Madison. For most of the activities and interactions that we will work on together, I will trust that you are doing your own work under the conditions that I suggest. When you submit major assignments or sit for examinations, I may ask you to verify the originality of your work using TurnItIn, sign a pledge that you undertook the activity under controlled circumstances, or even take the exam under remote-proctored conditions. Regardless of the safeguards we use, I want you to act with integrity and get the most out of your learning experience.
Step 4: Establish the Conversation

The examples listed in this guide are not a comprehensive list of things to update or change, and you should exercise your academic freedom to select and enact changes that make the most sense for you and your students as you move to alternate-delivery formats. Balance that freedom with our collective responsibility to provide an open, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all students.

Link to your updated syllabus from your Canvas home page, then share your tentative plans with your students. Take steps right now to reach out to your students and get their ideas, input, and affirmation about the changes you are implementing in your syllabus and course.

Example:

E-mail to all students
Subject: What You Need to Know about [COURSE CODE] via Remote Instruction

Dear students,

As we make the transition from face-to-face instruction to remote teaching, I want to share some updates to how we are going to conduct our course together. An updated syllabus is attached to this message and is also now the home page for our course environment in Canvas at [LINK TO CANVAS COURSE].

I need your help in making this shift smoothly. To minimize possible disruptions to our course, please take two actions right now:

1. Acknowledge that you have read the syllabus updates by replying to this message (don’t “reply all,” please) | marking this spreadsheet next to your name [LINK TO YOUR OWN SPREADSHEET].
2. Reply to this message | Share your ideas in this spreadsheet [LINK TO YOUR OWN SPREADSHEET] and let me know what barriers might prevent you from taking a full and active part in our alternate-delivery course activities, as well as your feedback regarding the updates to the syllabus.

Everyone at UW-Madison is working together to ensure that we can continue our courses in an effective and supportive way. I am committed to being flexible and understanding as we build a new way of learning together, and I will ask for your understanding with me, too, as we all go along. For now, please do those two quick things—read the syllabus update and share your challenges and comments—and watch for more support and communication from me and from the university in the coming days.

Send questions, comments, and ideas to InstructionalContinuity@provost.wisc.edu.