

11 Things to Consider when Moving Your Course Online

Created by the folks at the Connecticut College's Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) and Instructional Technology (IT)



With special thanks to Karen Gonzalez Rice, as well as Jessica McCollough, and Anthony Graesch.

1. **We don't know what we're doing! And that's OK!** Most of us don't have expertise in online teaching, and few if any of us have experience suddenly transitioning from a face-to-face course to a fully online course. What does learning mean under these new conditions? Our assumptions and expectations of what we--and students--can accomplish will likely need to change. While there's no one-size-fits-all or single best way to integrate digital tech into a remodeled curricular design, we have assembled some best practices in this document.
2. **Reassure students that we will figure it out together.** Acknowledge the big feelings involved with a closed campus, disrupted semester, and the general anxiety of this uncertain time. If you feel comfortable doing so, invite students to discuss what they are experiencing, air concerns, and ask questions. Consider involving students in the work of figuring out how to best meet course objectives in the context of a now-online course, and indicate to them what kind of flexibility is possible within the framework of the course (e.g., course objectives, pacing, assessment, project timing, etc.).
3. **Make sure all students have access to the materials, books, and technology they need to continue the class.** Think inclusively: be clear with students about what they need for your class, from books to webcams. As much as possible, choose technologies that can work on a phone, in case students don't have access to a reliable computer or have spotty wi-fi. If you do opt to use high-tech options to facilitate in-person discussion (e.g., [Webex](#) or Zoom web conferencing), consider allowing students who do not have access to tech, apps, or big data plans the option of engaging with course material using lower-tech solutions such as posting a written response to a forum or emailing a reflection paper.
4. **Evaluate and consider streamlining or adapting your curricular objectives.** What are the most essential learning outcomes for your course? Some outcomes are mapped onto physical spaces, equipment, and activities that are more challenging to adapt to virtual spaces and modes of interaction. Think about [key objectives, accessibility, and transparency](#). *Don't let the perfect get in the way of the good.*
5. **Keep it simple.** If possible, avoid adopting too many forms of digital tech with which you have little familiarity or prior experiences. Stick as much as possible with what you already know. Remember the staples: shared Google Docs are a great space to engage collaborative writing; Moodle forums afford opportunity for asynchronous conversations between students and instructors; emailed Word papers might suffice.

6. **Be intentional and transparent.** Choose digital tech that allows you to achieve a curricular goal and/or allows student participants to achieve a learning outcome. Communicate how these technologies fit into the context of assignment goals, the ways that the students will engage the assignment, and how you plan to assess their work/contributions.
7. **Re-establish classroom community.** Allow space and time for students to connect/reconnect individually and as a class. For example, students might record or write a short reflection (perhaps posted on a Moodle forum) on where and how they are working on course-related assignments during the campus closure, with attention to their work space, their strategies for staying connected, and how they are re-establishing routine. Or pair students up and ask them to check in with each other by email, text, or phone. You might also address COVID-19 from the perspective of your discipline ([see assignment ideas here](#)). These could be opportunities for exchanging ideas as well as for much-needed mindfulness amid somewhat unpredictable circumstances.
8. **Expect setbacks and frame student expectations around the notion of adaptability.** Technology will fail, time zones will be confused, assignments will be lost, and activities will go over like a lead balloon. Be prepared to help students problem-solve, extend deadlines, or simply wait for students to resolve issues and disruptions. It's ok to share that you don't know how to solve every problem, but do show that you will do your best to accommodate the chaos and to connect students to the help and resources they need.
9. **Consider regularly gathering feedback on how the class is going.** It will likely be challenging to gauge how the class is going and how students are responding to the online environment. Engage students in self-reflection and get a sense of their learning trajectories by offering opportunities for feedback in a variety of forms, including 5-minute free-writing posts to Moodle, an anonymous Google form, a targeted email, or using class time to invite students to text or talk on the phone with a peer in the class and then reporting out.
10. **Re-evaluate participation and other grading criteria.** Many schema for assessing student participation will no longer work as expected. Think about how students can show they are paying attention, attending class sessions prepared, and meeting learning goals in ways that the original syllabus did not necessarily capture.
11. **Take it slow.** Resist feelings of urgency. Avoid planning the rest of the semester all at once. We don't know what's next, or what will work best. Before committing to a totally new course plan or technology, take the time to engage students in the work of course revision, make a few changes at a time, and evaluate their impact. In other words, slow down, and stay flexible, patient, and thoughtful. And good luck!

For comment or suggestions, please contact Michael Reder at reder@conncoll.edu

Below is a curated list of resources with specific suggestions for moving your classes online.

A Curated List of Additional Teaching Resources for Moving Your Course Online *Curated by the folks at the Connecticut College CTL and IT*

Getting Started

- [Going Online in a Hurry](#) (Chronicle)
- [Fillable Course Continuity Plan](#) (NC State)
- [Get Started](#) (Indiana University)
- [Remote teaching and learning](#) and [strategies](#) (Bowdoin College)
- [Resource guide for holding courses remotely](#) (Centre College)

Accessibility and Inclusivity

- [Accessibility Teaching in the Time of COVID-19](#) (*Mapping Access* blog)
- [Inclusive approaches to supporting students during times of disruption](#) (Brown University)
- [Teaching in the Context of COVID-19](#), including COVID-19-focused assignments (Jacqueline Wernimont, Cathy N. Davidson)

General Resources about Online Teaching

- [How to Be A Better Online Teacher](#) (Chronicle)
- [Creating Online Learning Experiences](#) (Open Education Resource)

Mental Health Resources

Because you may be on the front lines of needing to help students who are falling apart, a couple of short articles:

- [Anxiety, OCD, Depression, and Coronavirus Fears](#) (Vox.com; first person account with suggestions)
- [Coronavirus Anxiety? Here's How to Keep It from Spiralling Out of Control](#) (ScienceAlert.com)

Resources for Teaching Specific Types of Classes

- [Seminars & Discussions](#) (Yale)
- [Academic Continuity: Labs](#) (Yale)
- [Labs & Studios](#) (Bowdoin)
- [Teaching Ceramics online](#) (crowdsourced)
- [Resources for Moving Dance-Based Pedagogy Online](#) (Dance Studies Association)
- [Teaching studio art in an era of social distancing](#) (Facebook group)
- [Teaching media & video production](#) (crowdsourced from faculty affiliated with the University Film and Video Association)

As you come across discipline-specific articles and documents, please share those with any colleagues who might be interested, and, if possible, also send those links to Michael at REDER@conncoll.edu