<u>Begin Planning the Distance Version of Your Courses Now</u>
A Brief Guide to Getting Started

While we don't know what shape the in-person components of our courses might take in Fall 2020, we can begin to plan for what would need to happen if, at some point, we need to shift into a fully distance mode for all of our classes.

- **Goals and Outcomes Come First:** Begin with program-level and course-level goals and outcomes: What course goals can be most fully achieved in a distance mode? Which will prove more challenging? Which ones are essential given what the course promises and what it provides students as they proceed through their program of study? How might you need to rephrase or reprioritize your outcomes depending on mode?

- **Pedagogy Follows Goals and Outcomes:** Consider what virtual pedagogies will serve those ends. For instance…
    - Synchronous (a.k.a. *real-time*) engagement with your students, whether as a whole class or in small groups is more mentally taxing in a virtual environment than in person. At the same time, it can be immensely powerful. So, think of synchronous engagement as *precious* in a virtual environment and use synchronous encounters purposefully to accomplish what synchronous learning does best:
        - Fostering dialogue and collaborative discussion.
        - Working through and processing new information.
        - Discussing sensitive or hot-button topics—particularly those that require a specialized or nuanced vocabulary that you want students to use well and with sensitivity or those that require the activation of a high level of social awareness.
        - Observing student applications of or experimentation of new knowledge to allow you to intervene in error when it happens.
        - To use observation of student interaction to find out what additional asynchronous (see below) resources you may need to provide.
        - To provide students the opportunity to lead discussion, give presentations, or practice public speaking.
        - To ask you—and one another—in-depth questions about complex material and concepts.
        - To build a sense of community, mutual commitment, shared endeavor, and belonging.
    - Use asynchronous (a.k.a., whatever the opposite of *real-time* is) engagement with course materials to accomplish goals that *don't require real-time interaction*.
        - Lecture and Demonstration: Plan to record lecture material in shorter, more easily digestible chunks of between 10 and 15 minutes, to provide to students as "homework."

- Virtual attention spans are shorter than in-person attention spans, so shorter pieces are generally more effective than longer pieces.
- Provide brief quizzes or questions for reflection to allow students to test their own understanding at the end of each brief session, and encourage students who have difficulty to rewatch the lecture.
- Consider how best to include students for whom visually or aurally engaging with material may present challenges by designing your materials with accessibility features integrated from the beginning.
  - Provide written summaries or your lecture materials and audio-recorded descriptions of visual artifacts.
  - Use Blackboard's captioning and text-description functions for images.
  - Read aloud all text presented to students as part of a lecture clip.
  - Where possible, ensure that visual elements of recorded material—including text—are large and high-contrast.
- Provide opportunities for real-time Q&A—either in group or one-on-one (e.g., "office hours") settings—*soon after you have made lecture and demonstration material available.*
- Film, Music and Video Clips linked in Blackboard (see more on Blackboard below)
  - For audio-visual content, consider providing students with questions or suggestions to guide their viewing or listening
  - As with lecture components (see above), brief quizzes or follow-up questions will allow students to begin to assess their own understanding
- Assigned individual reading and research (just as in ordinary face-to-face classes)
  - Again, consider providing guiding questions and suggestions in advance and opportunities for self-assessment
- Exchange of student work for peer critique and discussion
  - Ask students to post their work or images of their work, whether in its final form or as drafts/works-in-progress, in the Blackboard discussion forum and invite others to comment, critique, analyze, or otherwise respond to it within the forum.
  - As always, providing students with brief questions to guide their asynchronous exchanges
- Pre-writing, drafting, or similar student-produced work designed to prepare them for more effective and efficient synchronous engagement later on

- Assessments
  - Use Blackboard for quizzes and exams that don't require real-time student interaction.
  - Worried about cheating?
    - Ask your students to sign or record their recitation of a pledge or course-specific honor code
    - Include language about academic honesty in your syllabus and engage students in a discussion of it.
    - Design assessments that are difficult to cheat on:
      - Timed assessments that provide enough time to complete the task only if students have facility with the material
      - Open-book and open-note assessments
      - Assign interpretive, problem-solving, or analytical tasks
      - Ask students to show their work on quantitative assessments
      - Ask students to articulate and defend particular points of view or approaches
      - Ask students to apply knowledge to novel situations
    - Assign frequent, low-stakes assessments (reflection papers, quizzes) rather than infrequent, high-stakes assessments (midterm and final exams, long research papers)
    - Blackboard currently includes Respondus Lockdown; more information about access to other tools will become available soon.
  - Provide opportunities for students to practice using assessment technologies before the actual assessment happens.
  - At the end of exams and quizzes, invite students to share with you their perspectives on the experience of completing the on-line assessment

- **Course Design: Modularity and Agility**. The greater the degree to which we're able to "chunk" or modularize students' progress through our virtual courses, the lower the impact of disruptions—foreseen and unforeseen alike—and the greater the likelihood that students will remain engaged throughout the semester. Doing so will also *vastly increase the ease of planning for alternative delivery formats*, such as in-person and blended modes.
  - Plan student progress through your courses on a weekly, rather than daily basis, even if your class is currently scheduled to "meet" multiple days per week.
    - Assign the bulk of homework to take place over the relatively longer weekends.

- Assign enough work outside of scheduled class sessions to sustain a week's worth of engagement
  - Plan to meet synchronously with your class—either as a whole or in groups—only once per week for an extended period.
    - Because of the challenges of conducting large virtual plenary discussions, consider dividing your class in half or thirds and engaging separately with each group.
    - Schedule brief, synchronous one-on-one or small-group check-ins each week in place of "drop-in" or "on-request" office hours. Make sure to provide a variety of available times to accommodate students' crowded schedules.
    - Do not require students to take part in synchronous engagement at set times outside the scheduled class times, *even in a fully virtual course*.
  - Consider planning your course in three-to-five week sections or units, with a definite start and a definite endpoint—such as a culminating assignment, reflection, or other assessment.
  - If possible, consider creating modules that can be reordered depending on circumstances.
  - Link particular, discrete outcomes to individual modules, if possible.
  - Build some play into your schedule by allowing an extra day of catch up or transition time between modules.
  - To the extent course topics and goals allow, think of modules as mini courses-within-a-course.
  - If larger projects stretch across multiple modules, try to foresee how rearranging modules might affect that project's development and management.

- **Engage Teaching and Learning Technology**: It's easy to get paralyzed by the thought of learning and practicing unfamiliar technologies: The array of applications available in Blackboard's "Tools" menu is dizzying to those of us most familiar with face-to-face learning, and many of us feel a quite natural anxiety about becoming proficient enough in using them to conduct effective classes. In the words of the immortal—but, sadly, also dead—Douglas Adams, ***Don't Panic.***
  - First, you don't need to worry too much about which features and capabilities you need and what it will take to become familiar with them *until you've made decisions about outcomes, pedagogy, and over-all course plan and structure*.
  - Second, you are unlikely to need more than a few of the available features.
  So: Please do not start by looking up a list of available applications and asking yourself, "How can I use this tool in my teaching?" Instead, decide what you want to accomplish in your classes and with your pedagogy, and then ask, "What applications are necessary to accomplish my goals?"

  - **Blackboard Learn** is the only approved Learning Management software for use in Drake courses. To maximize student engagement and to minimize needless

frustration, please use your Blackboard course pages as the entry point for your students and the starting point for navigating all virtual course content.

- The left-side menu items on our Blackboard course pages provide more categories than we need, even in its new streamlined format. The fewer discrete menus you use, the better from a student-navigation point-of view. I advise focusing on the Announcements capabilities and the Course Information and Content areas first:
    - Course Information provides course policies, outcomes, overviews, over-arching criteria and expectations, along with contact information, and the like: Information that pertains to the course as a whole.
    - Content can house *everything else* including discussion forums and links to content elsewhere (such as the e-reserves system and other resources housed at Cowles Library).
        - Consider arranging course content—including assignment submittal links; assignment sheets and rubrics; tests and quizzes; links to video, audio, and text content; and discussion forums—<u>in the order in which you expect students to engage with them over the course of the semester or module</u>.
        - Please pre-set due dates and times for each item on the content menu that has a deadline associated with it. Doing so will allow students to treat your Content menu as an interactive, enactive syllabus, rather than having to (maddeningly) toggle back and forth from Content items to a separate list of deadlines. (Having to do so has proven a major frustration for students).
- Blackboard features and capabilities you may want to explore earlier if you're eager to play in the virtual sand:
    - Using the capacity to add assignments and other assessments to the Content menu to link them directly to the Grade Center.
    - Using the Grade Center to, at minimum, make grades available to students.
    - Using built-in due dates to link assignments to the calendar.
    - Using Announcements to manage high-level course communications.
    - Using Discussions to facilitate collaboration and exchange.
    - Using drag-and-drop and the "move" command to rearrange items within and between course areas.
    - Using Blackboard Collaborate Ultra and (soon) Zoom to provide synchronous engagement opportunities.
    - Using Blackboard Collaborate Ultra and Panopto to practice recording and distributing video content.

- Self-Service Resources Available
    - The CTE webpages now feature a suite of introductions to Drake-licensed teaching and learning technologies [here.](#)
    - Sign up for a free month of online Blackboard tutorials through Lynda [here.](#)
    - The CTE and DOCE co-curate a list of Blackboard-specific resources [here.](#) (I'm aware that there are some access issues with some of the links, but they'll be resolved shortly).
    - Categorized resources for remote teaching and learning are updated frequently [here.](#)