**Effective Use of Limited Class Time
in a Blended-Learning Format**

Center for Teaching Excellence
Drake University

July 2020

If you are scheduled to teach blended courses, where some of the teaching and learning take place in person and some virtually, the following comes as guidance on how to *maximize the in-person time you have with all students in your classes* while, at the same time, *providing equivalent synchronous instruction to students who are enrolled virtually*.

It also provides suggestions for using the necessarily more limited face-to-face class time effectively.

The following are guidelines. Use or modify them—or create alternatives—in ways that best serve the learning outcomes of your courses. Please consult Faculty Senate's policies on alternatives to seat-time as you do so. If you are unsure whether an alternative you're considering is permitted or feasible under current conditions, please consult your local dean's office; please also remember to keep your department chairs and program directors in the loop as you finalize your plans.

This guidance is based on several assumptions:

- Your assigned learning space will likely not accommodate more than 50% of your enrolled students face-to-face at the same time (and possibly no more than 34% of students for 3x/week classes). Note, also, that capacity will require us to maintain a standard configuration in each classroom.
- At least a few of your students will be enrolled as fully virtual attendees and will not attend any face-to-face meetings. You'll have a better idea of how many such students are enrolled in your classes by mid-August.
- At some point in the term, some of your students may need to quarantine for from several days to two weeks or even longer because of Covid-19 exposure. For that time period, they will need to be treated in the same way as students enrolled fully virtually.
- You will likely need to repeat some in-person lessons/activities for each group you meet with separately.
- Some of your students will transition permanently from face-to-face to fully virtual enrollment.
- You have already planned your semester on a week-by-week, rather than meeting-by-meeting schedule.
- You have already completed the planning for the fully virtual version of your courses in case at some point in the semester in-person meetings are suspended.

For classes that meet once a week

1. Divide the class into three groups:
    a. Group A: Half of your in-person students
    b. Group B: The other half of your in-person students
    c. Group C: Students enrolled fully virtually
2. Devote the first half of each class period to meeting in person with Group A or B, on alternating weeks.
3. Devote the second half of each class period to meeting virtually with Group B or A, on alternating weeks, plus group C every week.
4. Assign additional contact-equivalent learning opportunities (see below) to all students to allow them guided pathways through material or learning activities to make up for the 50% reduction in synchronous class time.

We cannot meet in person with two different groups of students in two halves of a single day's meeting because rooms must be cleaned between groups, and cleanings are scheduled to take place between regularly scheduled class sessions.

For classes that meet twice a week:

Scenario Alpha:
1. Divide the class into three groups:
    a. Group A: Half of your in-person students
    b. Group B: The other half of your in-person students
    c. Group C: Students enrolled fully virtually or in quarantine
2. Devote the first class period each week to meeting in person with Group A or B, on alternating weeks.
3. Devote the second class period each week to meeting virtually with Group B or A, on alternating weeks, plus group C every week.
4. Assign additional contact-equivalent learning opportunities (see below) to all students to allow them guided pathways through material or learning activities to make up for the 50% reduction in synchronous class time.

Scenario Beta:
1. Divide the class into three groups:
    a. Group A: Half of your in-person students
    b. Group B: The other half of your in-person students
    c. Group C: Students enrolled fully virtually or in quarantine
2. Devote the first two-thirds of the first class period each week to meeting in person with Group A, and the final third to meeting with Group C virtually.
3. Devote the first two-thirds of the second class period each week to meeting in person with Group A, and the final third to meeting with Group C virtually.
4. Assign additional contact-equivalent learning opportunities (see below) to all students to allow them guided pathways through material or learning activities to make up for the 50% reduction in synchronous class time.

For classes that meet three times each week

Note: For 3x/week classes, classroom assignments will be made based on 1/3 total enrollment's capacity.

<u>Scenario Alpha</u>
1. Divide the class into four groups:
    a. Group A: One third of your in-person students
    b. Group B: One third of your in-person students
    c. Group C: One third of your in-person students
    d. Group D: Students enrolled fully virtually or in quarantine
2. Devote the first class period each week to meeting in person with Group A, B or C, rotating groups each week.
3. Devote the second class period each week to meeting in person with Group B, C, or A, rotating groups each week.
4. Devote the third period each week to meeting virtually with Group C, B, or A, rotating groups each week, along with Group D

<u>Scenario Beta</u> (*If at least 1/3 of your students are enrolled fully virtually*)

1. Divide the class in to three groups:
    a. Group A: One half of your in-person students (not to exceed 1/3 of the total enrollment in your course).
    b. Group B: The other half of your in-person students (not to exceed 1/3 of the total enrollment in your course).
    c. Group C: Students enrolled fully virtually (at least 1/3 of the total enrollment in your course) + quarantined students
2. Devote the first class period each week to meeting in person with Group A.
3. Devote the second class period each week to meeting in person with Group B.
4. Devote the third class period each week to meeting virtually with Group C.

Contact-Equivalent Activities

Those who adopt one of the approaches above will be meeting for less total time synchronously with all students, and even less total time face-to-face. So, we need to find ways of providing Contact-Equivalent Activities (CEAs) to our students for when they're not meeting with us.

CEAs are activities that require (a) a degree of active engagement with the material, with you, and/or with classmates, or (b) require continuous engagement with instructional materials provided by you, or (c), some combination of both. They are <u>not the same</u> as an additional hour or two of regular homework: problem sets, additional reading, more writing, etc.

While CEAs may well expose the learner to *more* content than they would be able to encounter during limited class time, their purpose is primarily to help foster a *deeper, more authentic* engagement with that material.

Some **examples** of Contact-Equivalent Activities, listed generally from lowest- to highest-impact, include:
- Instructor-created video lectures and demonstration (10-to-15 minute segments)
- Self-Assessments, such as review questions and quizzes, keyed to video lectures and demonstrations.
- Engaging with instructor feedback on assignments/revision.
- Discussion questions and pre-writing using discussion forums and journals.
- Creating, updating, and revising learning portfolios.
- Instructor meetings with individuals and small groups.
- Student-led virtual discussions (small- and large-group).
- Student-led review sessions/collaborative problem-solving.
- Instructor-led disciplinary research assistance.
- Community-engaged learning activities, service projects, fieldwork, site visits and internships.

Effective CEAs are distinguished by one or more of the **following features**:
- They allow the learner to assess their own performance as they're doing it, providing immediate feedback on their success (or failure).
- They provide the learner a means for identifying their strengths—and, more importantly, shortcomings—as they perform assigned tasks.
- They give the learner opportunities to revisit, reflect on, and revise their work.
- They give the learner opportunities to learn from their classmates.
- They allow the learner to engage in authentic exploration and inquiry in real-world contexts.
- They prepare the learner to more effectively engage in and learn from future in-class activities (prospective) instead of reviewing, applying, or testing lessons learned from previous in-class activities (retrospective).

Effective CEAs, in turn, allow for more **effective, efficient use of class time to**:
- Pose and answer questions that arise from learners' encounters with the CEAs.
- Case studies and applications.
- Simulations and games.
- Role play (appropriately distanced).
- Coach "hands-on" skills.
- Complicate, deepen, or reinforce learning.
- Above all, to discover and immediately intervene in student error. (This may come as a surprise to students who expect that class is meant to validate what they already know, allow them to demonstrate mastery, or provide knowledge)

In addition to these suggestions, the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning at Yale provides a more [comprehensive resource here](#).

Generally, under the current circumstances, it is best to avoid asking students to do during class-time something they could just as well do alone (i.e., individual writing, completion of problem sets).

One final note: These recommendations offer ways of contending with abbreviated real-time and face-to-face encounters with learners. However, these practices will increase teaching effectiveness even during "normal" semesters. So, plan to institute pandemic-resilient activities that you can also continue to use even when we have returned to a fully in-person modality in future semesters.