

Pitt Public Health

Guidance on Updating Course Syllabi for Remote Learning

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Where to Start

With courses being held remotely, the need for your class syllabus to reflect the virtual learning environment and assessments is needed. Below are elements that are to be included and/ or updated in your syllabus to ensure that it is transparent to students.

Reading through your syllabus to identify what needs to be modified is a great place to start.

Remote syllabi should include the following elements:

Class Delivery Method

These are the three most popular options:

1. Asynchronous with scheduled times and/or established due dates for each assignment/assessment. The advantage of this method is that it allows students with competing demands (work and/ or childcare, caregiver responsibilities, etc.) to participate in the course.
2. Synchronous at the normally scheduled class meeting, with some flexibility regarding attendance as some students may be in different time zones or have caregiving responsibilities that conflict with class times. If the course is held during a specific time, it is recommended to record the class and to post the transcripts to your course site on Canvas afterwards.

[Note: if you will be recording a class session that involves student interaction, you must inform the students of this via e-mail before the lecture is held and at the beginning of each lecture. The notification is to let students know that your lecture and their participation is being recorded. Students cannot be required to participate in the recorded conversation. Encourage students who chose to opt out of participating in the recorded session to ask questions offline. Further, the recorded lecture may be used by the faculty member and the registered students only for internal class purposes and only during the term in which the course is being offered.]

3. Combination of the two formats with a clear outline of both the asynchronous and synchronous portions (the latter of which should be held during the normally scheduled class meeting time).

Communication with Students

- Set up virtual office hours & state your preferred contact method(s) (i.e. Skype for Business, Zoom link, e-mail, phone number) in the syllabus.
- Let students know how best to reach you (e-mail or phone) and how quickly they should expect a reply. It's ok to have time blocked out for yourself to be "offline."
- Should students reach out and need further resources, review available University resources (disability services, counseling center, Office of International Services) on the University Center for Teaching and Learning's [webpage on communication](#).

Learning Objectives & Assessments/ Assignments

Review your learning objectives and assessments/ assignments in the course. Modifications to assignments or exams can be made to both to fit better into a remote environment, but learning objectives should remain the same. Feel free to be creative. Ideas for exams and other large assessments is available on the University Center for Teaching and Learning's [webpage on assessments](#).

Accessibility of Course Materials

Review your materials to ensure that they meet accessibility standards, keeping in mind that students will be accessing materials electronically (on a screen). Some items in your materials that can be easily modified to ensure accessibility include:

- hyperlinks to webpages: include a description of where the link will take the student (i.e. this link refers to the ACHD webpage on infection control)
- readable PDFs: documents saved as PDFs must be of good quality and not photocopies or an image/ picture of the text
- font color: colors can convey meaning and if you use color to do such, you must also ensure that the meaning of the colors is noted in the materials or presentation
- captions: many of the programs that we use (Panopto & Microsoft Teams) have built in speech-to-text features, but keep in mind that you will still to check the accuracy of them once the recording is complete
- lecture notes: if possible, make available any of your notes for lectures to students
- alternate text: where images are embedded in a PowerPoint presentation or document, insert alt text by right clicking on the image and entering the description in the text box provided (i.e. photo of a dog sitting in the grass)

Many of the above items make it possible for screen reader technology to operate properly.

The SensusAccess program allows for easy conversions of files. Learn more [here](#). There are additional resources on ensuring accessibility are available from the University Center for Teaching and Learning's [webpage on accessibility](#).

[Note: The [Office of Disability Services and Resources](#) maintains their status as the established office on campus to assist students who request accommodations. Should you have a student with a disclosed disability, the office will communicate with you directly via e-mail.]

Additional help

The University Center for Teaching and Learning has a [website](#) dedicated to teaching remotely. They are also holding workshops online for faculty (see workshop schedule – see workshop recordings from previously-held workshops). If you have further questions, they can be reached by submitting an [online webform](#).

If students reach out and inform you that they need a stable Internet connection or a computer, Pitt IT established a hotspot & computer loaner program. Details, which are to be shared with students, on the Pitt program are available [here](#).