Considering Alternatives & Adjustments To Your Major Assessments

As you become more familiar with emergency remote teaching, you may be able to pause to reflect on how your class is going. Last week, we shared some tips on managing your and your students' time. At this point, you may be wondering about whether you want or need to make additional adjustments, given what you have learned about your students these past few weeks. Here are some strategies and tips to guide your thinking.

DO YOU NEED TO UPDATE YOUR PLAN?

As you moved to remote teaching, you may already have made some changes to your major assignments. As you consider your closing weeks of the term, this is a good time to think about whether what you have planned is still an adequate and feasible measure of your students' knowledge and/or ability to reach a crucial learning goal. You can start by considering the following questions:

- **How have your students performed thus far on low-stakes assignments (e.g., quizzes, discussion board participation)?** If these assessments show that students are not keeping up, or that they are struggling to access materials or assignments, you might think about making adjustments to upcoming higher stakes assignments.
- **Do your students need more practice or guidance before the final exam/assignment**? There is still time to create opportunities for non-graded or participation-graded quizzes, proposals, review assignments, or short-answer tasks.
- **Can you adjust the final assignment or exam to focus on the concepts that are highest priority or relevance in the current situation**? Whether you measure student knowledge by testing memorization/comprehension, and/or assess student critical thinking through tasks that require application or analysis, it is fine to make adjustments to ensure that your assessments measure what your students are currently learning.
- **Do you have a "Plan B" in mind**? Events beyond student control—whether technological, medical, familial, or financial—may limit their ability to complete a major exam or project. If a student contacts you about one of these barriers, is there an alternative you might offer that would accommodate their resource limitations while still fairly assessing their learning?

COULD YOU ADOPT AN ALTERNATIVE TO A "TRADITIONAL" EXAM?

Open book exams allow students to consult some kind of material during the exam, are usually distributed beforehand, and have a longer completion time. Questions require students to integrate multiple sources of information to answer a question or apply concepts to real-world situations and applications. See "**A Guide for Academics – Open Book Exams**" for more information.

Hybrid tests: If you are used to giving multiple choice tests, you might consider a "hybrid test" in two parts: one part where points come from multiple-choice or matching questions and a second part where students apply concepts or work problems using short-answer or brief essay questions to demonstrate how they integrate their new knowledge.

Series of quizzes or unit tests: Breaking down a major exam into smaller assessments at regular intervals can reduce the stress students experience with a single, high-stakes assessment.

NOTE: Timed exams in the online environment can create stress for students, are vulnerable to bandwidth limits, are not necessarily "cheat-proof," and often put students with disabilities at a disadvantage (**Kim, 2020**). Given these concerns, you might change plans for timed exams and instead offer all students more (or unlimited) time.

COULD YOU ADOPT AN ALTERNATIVE TO A "TRADITIONAL" PAPER?

If you want to adapt a comprehensive final essay or report, you could consider an alternative writing assignment, problem-based project, or presentation instead. These alternatives can help you focus on assessing specific knowledge or skills—such as analyzing and synthesizing information as well as constructing evidence-based arguments—in a format that can be more accessible to students in a high-stress online learning environment. Here are some tips to accomplish these goals and engage students:

- **Everything but the Paper:** If your goal is to focus more on your students' ability to locate, evaluate and compare sources, consider an annotated bibliography and/or a topic proposal.
- **Oral Presentation**: Students can video record a presentation or add audio to a PowerPoint presentation and upload it to a Discussion Board or Wiki in Blackboard to receive feedback from students. Using a rubric developed in Blackboard (**Rubrics - Blackboard Help**) can make grading the assignment more efficient and grades can go directly into the Grade Center.
- **Proposal**: Students can apply concepts previously learned in class to a real-world setting by writing a grant proposal, a research funding request, or a marketing plan, and "pitch" them to their fellow classmates.
- **Web-Based Project**: Using the blog feature in Blackboard (**Blogs – Blackboard Help**), you can have students create a multi-media version of the paper or a website.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"A Guide for Academics – Open Book Exams," Centre for Teaching and Learning, The University of Newcastle, Australia, **https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/268980/Open-Book-Exams.pdf**.

"Alternatives to the Research Paper," Writing Across the Curriculum, George Mason University, **https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Alternatives-to-the-Research-Paper1.pdf**.

Laura Wheeler Poms, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Global Community and Health (CHHS) & Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning Faculty Fellow shared this week's Remote Teaching Survival Tips.

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