GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY | Digital Learning
Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning

January 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome, or welcome back, to teaching at Mason! If you are scheduled to teach a fully-online course in Spring 2021, or if you plan to incorporate online components into your teaching, the Stearns Center Digital Learning Team is here to help.

Please review the information and resources presented here as you prepare your Spring 2021 online courses. In this letter, we will **(1)** direct you to the Stearns Center "*Teaching in Spring 2021*" website; **(2)** share resources for designing and teaching online courses, including link to access our Blackboard course template; **(3)** inform you of consultations, webinars, and other training opportunities available through the Stearns Center; **(4)** provide you with a syllabus checklist to ensure that yours is complete; **(5)** inform you about important changes you will see in Blackboard; and finally **(6)** promote campus services for supporting students, including important resources for academic integrity, learning services, and for making your online courses accessible.

(1) Stearns Center *"Teaching Spring 2021"* Landing Page: Check out our Teaching in Spring 2021 website for "one-stop shop" for teaching and learning information for Mason faculty for Spring 2021. You may use the search tool at the bottom of any of our site pages to locate resources for your specific teaching topics.

(2) NEW! Please check out our **Continuing Development Programming** workshop options for Spring 2021. We're taking the best of our long-form workshops and presenting just-enough, just-in-time information to support your spring teaching. Join a single workshop, or complete three from the categories to earn our new CDP Level 1 Credential to list on your cv or annual report.

(2) Resources: Our resources include information about asynchronous online teaching, synchronous online teaching, and also information for those new to Blackboard (with a course template you can upload). Also visit Teaching Online on the Stearns Center website, where you will find steps for successful online course design, and online teaching experience, as well as online quality. In Spring 2021 resources, we also have posted link to guidelines and practices for Anti-Racist and Inclusive Teaching.

(3) Consultations, Webinars, and Other Training Opportunities: Please visit our website for updated information and schedule; keep checking for updates and new resources, as this page is being updated regularly.

- **Office Hours/Consultations:** Stearns Center staff are teleworking and will be glad to assist you with any questions related to teaching, managing, and developing your hybrid or online courses via email or Zoom. Please submit your questions or schedule a 1:1 consultation through the link found on our site under Upcoming Office Hours/Consultations.
- **Webinars**: Visit our website for list of recorded webinars about online course design and teaching; Zoom and Collaborate Ultra; and about other Blackboard Tools. Throughout Spring semester, the Stearns Center Digital Learning Team will hold a series of webinars about specific topics for online teaching. Topics will include online course readiness & quality, alternative and

authentic assessments; engaging online learners, class engagement & interactions, accessibility; creating effective videos, etc. Please check the Stearns Center website regularly for updates on dates and registration.

- **Other Professional Development for Faculty at Mason:** Visit our website for a list of links to other support offices on campus offering professional development.

(4) Syllabus Checklist: The syllabus sets the structure and tone for the course. It clearly defines student and instructor expectations. The Stearns Center website has information for Designing Your Syllabus, including sample statements about academic integrity and accommodations for disabilities. We also include sample language for policies for new course structures and interactions. As you finalize the syllabus for your upcoming online course, review the Online Syllabus Checklist to ensure that it is complete. Your program or department might have specific guidelines for course syllabi, so check with them as well. As noted on the Stearns Center website, all syllabi ought to be made available to students on or before the first day of class and ought to minimally include basic information about you and the course, grading and course requirements, course-specific policies, your course schedule, and information on academic integrity, Title IX reporting and resources, and accommodations through Disability Services. Please remember to adjust for the new calendar, in which there is *no Spring Break week*; beyond shifting the dates, your Stearns Center colleagues encourage you to consider ways you can adapt your teaching to help your students (and yourself!) cope with the learning-marathon we are all engaged in this spring.

(5) Important Blackboard Changes: Starting January 4, 2021, there will be a new MyMason/Blackboard Navigation. Please note that the basic look and functionality of Blackboard courses and organization is not changing; but there are some changes. You may see the list of the Blackboard changes on ITS website.

(6) Supporting Students at George Mason University: Links to Mason student support resources and services are provided on the Stearns Center website. We wish to highlight the following offices and services:

- **Office of Academic Integrity (OAI):** Visit the Faculty Resource Center on the OAI website for detailed information about syllabus language, preventative resources, referral submission portal, and common faculty questions. You also are encouraged to incorporate the Academic Integrity Training Module (created by the Office of Academic Integrity and Stearns Center Digital Learning) into your online course & teaching.
- **Learning Services:** GMU Learning Services provide a variety of free, experience-based learning opportunities for Mason students through one-on-one academic coaching, academic success workshops, and online resources. Resources, tips, and guidance for success in asynchronous and synchronous learning environments are available. Be sure to share link to Learning Services website with your students!
- **Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI):** Please visit ATI website for tips and resources for making your Blackboard course accessible. Also check out guidance for how to use Blackboard Ally to check your online content for accessibility.

We appreciate all of your efforts during the pandemic to provide quality learning experiences for Mason students. If you have any questions about online teaching or seek additional or specific guidance in preparing your Spring online course, please contact us at stearns@gmu.edu.

We hope your Spring 2021 online course is a rewarding and productive experience! Stay well and safe!

Best wishes,

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