

Rethinking Finals

During Emergency Remote Instruction

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We cannot deny that for many students and faculty, the first weeks of our transition to emergency remote instruction (ERI) were very tough. Whether it be connectivity issues, a lack of appropriate equipment, unfamiliar technical tools, illness, child-care, or other added responsibilities at home, **the potential for a disruption to student learning has been high.**

While we have all worked very hard to maintain continuity of teaching and learning, we know **coverage of material does not guarantee learning has occurred.** Students learn in different ways. The new educational environment (i.e., emergency remote instruction or ERI) has presented some students with additional access to learning, while for others it has created barriers that were unforeseeable and uncontrollable. Any potential for disruption to teaching, learning, and/or assessment is an *equity issue* that needs our full attention.

Finals are traditionally a mechanism to assess how well our students **met** our desired learning outcomes for the course. These are often referred to as summative *assessments or assessments “of” learning* and can help us determine how effectively we designed our units, where students struggled/succeeded, and what revisions we might need to make in future iterations of the course. But clearly, the unusual circumstance of having moved quickly to ERI presents us with an opportunity to **rethink how we assess student learning here at the end of the semester.**

Assessment “as” Learning

Assessment “as” learning is an alternative way to think about how you design your final assessment. The purpose is **to enhance and facilitate mastery of the learning outcomes.** Consider how you might you craft the final as an opportunity to deepen and refine student understandings as opposed to a summative evaluation “of” student learnings.

Enduring understandings are statements summarizing important ideas and core processes that are central to a discipline and have lasting value beyond the classroom. They synthesize what students should understand—not just know or do—as a result of studying a particular content area (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

For those of you who utilize papers, essays, presentations, or projects as a final assessment of student learning, transport, Pting these via email or Canvas will not be difficult. However, for those more traditional exams (i.e., multiple choice) that are usually done F2F and/or proctored, you may consider modifying how the final assessment is completed. Your purpose in modifying the final exam is to utilize the assessment to **facilitate understanding, critical thinking, problem-solving, and professional behaviors/skills consistent with the discipline.**

Options to Consider:

- Making the final exam an ***open book or collaborative learning experience*** whereby students work together to deepen their understandings and master learning essential and enduring understandings.
- Designing performance tasks and projects that **are open-ended (untimed), complex, and authentic.**
- Adding an ***exam wrapper that asks students to reflect on their key learnings from the course/semester.***
 - For example: “In preparation for this reflection, please review the course learning outcomes. Describe what *Key Learnings and/or Big ideas* you have gained from this course that may or may not have been reflected in your overall performance on the final exam or other assessments this semester. Please keep your reflection to 1-2 pages.”

Additional Resources

- UC Davis Center for Educational Effectiveness: Testing Alternatives
<https://keepteaching.ucdavis.edu/test/testing-alternatives>
- UC Berkley Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning: Multiple Alternatives to Traditional Testing
<https://teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/improve/alternatives-traditional-testing>
- Indiana University Bloomington Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning: Alternatives to Traditional Exams and Papers
<https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/assessing-student-learning/alternatives-traditional-exams-papers/index.html>
- Cal Poly Center for Teaching, Learning, & Technology: Assessments for Virtual Instruction
<https://ctlr.calpoly.edu/finals-winter-quarter-2020>
- University of Denver Office of Teaching and Learning: Moving Your Final Exams Online
<http://otl.du.edu/moving-your-final-exams-online/>