

Managing Emergency Remote Instruction: Rethinking Assessment

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The quick move to emergency remote instruction (ERI) caught both faculty and students off guard, and while we are extremely proud of the “we-are-in-this-together” spirit we have witnessed, we cannot deny that for many the first weeks were very rough. 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. Additionally, while we may be able to say that the delivery of course content has continued, we know mere *coverage* of material does not guarantee learning has occurred. Students learn in different ways. The new educational environment (i.e., ERI) has presented some students with additional access to learning, while for others it has created barriers that were unforeseeable and uncontrollable.

As such, our immediate response to COVID-19 and the impact to student learning presents an opportunity for us to ***rethink why and how we assess student learning***. And, any potential for disruption to learning and/or assessment is an equity issue that needs our full attention. Consider whether the following *alternatives* may be appropriate to your course and situation.

Formative Assessments/Regular Checks for Understanding

Design formative, weekly quizzes as low stakes checks for understanding among students. Rather than using these as accountability measures to ensure students are reading (reward/punishment), design them to guide student learning and subsequent instruction. The purpose shifts from assessment “of” student learning to assessment “for” student learning. In other words, we want to amplify and facilitate mastery of key understandings rather than control student behaviors.

Consider:

- Weekly quizzes could be a mixture of lower-level terminology items and higher-level analysis, synthesis, and/or application questions.
- You might consider allowing students to do open book quizzes and/or collaboratively with a peer (both names go on the exam).

Summative Assessments/ Periodic Evaluations of Student Learning

For those of you who utilize papers, essays, presentations, or projects as a mid-term or final assessment of student learning, transporting 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 the assessment(s).

These alternative assessments aim to facilitate critical thinking, problem-solving, and professional behaviors/skills consistent with the discipline. Given the potential disruption to student learning this semester, the purpose of the final assessment shifts from measuring the depth of student understanding (i.e., assessment *of* learning) to amplifying the essential understandings (assessment *for* learning) in your course. Of course, you will want to create high-level analysis, synthesis, application, and/or evaluation exercises.

Consider:

- Mid-term and final exams as open book or collaborative events,
- *Employ Academic prompts, and/or other*
- *Design performance tasks and projects* that are:
 - Open-ended,
 - Complex, and
 - Authentic

Resources

1. UC Davis Center for Educational Effectiveness: Testing Alternatives

<https://keepteaching.ucdavis.edu/test/testing-alternatives>

“Many assessments (e.g., research papers, written projects, essays, etc.) can be addressed through Canvas or email, and may need little or no modification. However, some assessments (e.g., multiple-choice exams) require the instructor, TAs or a proctor to be present. When that is the case, it may be helpful to think about alternative ways to assess your students...This resource/website provides some key considerations for thinking about course-level assessments (particularly, multiple-choice exams) in a modified instructional environment. Then you will see some alternative formats for assessing student learning that may be helpful if you suddenly have to move your class online.”

2. UC Berkley Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning: Multiple Alternatives to Traditional Testing

<https://teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/improve/alternatives-traditional-testing>

3. 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>

4. Cal Poly Center for Teaching, Learning, & Technology: Assessments for Virtual Instruction

<https://ctlit.calpoly.edu/finals-winter-quarter-2020>

5. University of Denver Office of Teaching and Learning: Moving Your Final Exams Online

<http://otl.du.edu/moving-your-final-exams-online/>