FAQs From the Bringing Courses
Online Fast in Response to COVID-19 Webinar

Q: How do we ensure equitable access to online education for disadvantaged students? Particular populations of concern include low-income, rural, homeless, and students with disabilities.

A: Some campuses have negotiated deals with local internet service providers to offer free internet access to students in need for a specific time period (see University of Hawaii System example). Keeping computer labs open on campus maybe another option where allowed. If authorized to use labs, computers should be appropriately spaced (or de-activated at intervals) to ensure students maintain social distancing.

Institutions can also explore the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) to provide free access to textbooks and other course materials while libraries are closed.

Asynchronous teaching should be used as much as possible to reduce bandwidth requirements for students with unstable internet access; creating course books that might be mail-able is an option for rural students who don’t have regular access.

For students with disabilities, commonly used online platforms such as Zoom provide options for closed-captioning. Institutions can also encourage students to let faculty know if they need disability services. Tutoring and other academic support services may also be delivered virtually to support students with learning disabilities.

Q: How are campuses handling assessment, including delivery of exams, assignment of course grades (letter or pass/fail)?

A: Giving students the option to take a pass/fail grade may reduce stress and could be a viable solution. Many grading policies are owned by faculty so they may choose to keep grades, but faculty should clearly communicate their updated policies to students. Beware that in some cases assigning no grade could detrimentally impact the student’s graduation prospects or federal aid. Some campuses are asking faculty to enter a letter grade in grade books so that the student will have one if they need it in the future. Ask faculty to consider what grades students were getting before spring break (past trajectory), then evaluate how well students do in the online course and use both data points.

Third-party sites such as ProctorU, Examity, Honor Lock, and others may be used to administer exams remotely. An alternative route to summative assessment for the course might be replacing a supervised
examination with some type of project or open-book assessment that is easier to personalize and less dependent on proctoring.

**Q: How do we adapt lab, clinical, and field components of courses for an online setting?**

**A:** There are a number of resources for conducting virtual labs, including some with sample datasets for cases in which students cannot generate their own data as they might in lab. One of the most popular is the [North American Network of Science Labs Online (NANSLO)](https://www.nanslo.org). There is also a robust, crowdsourced list of virtual labs organized by discipline that continues to be updated. Other options shared by our APLU members include [Labster](https://www.labster.com) and [JoVE](https://www.jove.com). There should be distinctions between high-stakes labs and low-stake labs where virtual or online demonstrations are available.

High-stakes labs like those for health professions schools have kept their simulation labs open but have restricted access to small groups of less than 10 to limit the possibility of contagion. If virtual labs are truly not an option, some campuses (including those in the University of Hawaii system) are creating smaller groups for these in-person components and scheduling them in a staggered way so students are not all coming to campus at the same time.

**Q: What are some strategies for incorporating active learning, small group discussion, and other evidence-based teaching practices into virtual courses?**

**A:** The UNC System guide, [Moving to Alternative Instructional Formats](https://www.unc.edu/depts/apsu/alternativeformats/), contains some recommendations: for highly interactive classes, the instructor can host a Zoom meeting for the whole class and create breakout rooms within Zoom for smaller groups. Many Learning Management Systems (LMS) have asynchronous capability for breakout and group formation. Discussion boards could also be useful to students, both in terms of sharing learning and also how they are doing during this emergency.

Faculty can encourage higher level/older students to meet in small student groups virtually. They can convene on their own using Microsoft Teams and Google Hangouts as well. Instructors can full advantage of Microsoft Teams, Office 365 or Google Docs to collaboratively write or edit content (UNC recommends that faculty create groups of no more than four students).

**Q: How do we manage communications to avoid information overload while ensuring students, faculty, and staff get what they need?**

**A:** Given that we are in an emergency situation, we can’t risk leaving out any critical audiences, so mass communication “blasts” are unavoidable. Coordinating these communications centrally through the institution, however, may help reduce overload while ensuring timely and accurate information. As Dr. Okimoto recommended: figure out who will be doing the communication and route everything through that one person to avoid sending mixed or conflicting messages. Most schools have also created a dedicated website for all their COVID-19-related communications. For examples of how other universities are managing communications, see APLU’s webpage featuring [Public University Communications on COVID-19](https://www.aplu.org/covid-19-communications).

Faculty communications are also critical. Faculty should be emailing and posting inside the LMS. They need to be open to the fact that we are all in this together and while this is not how they planned the semester, the pandemic requires we all do our part.
Q: How are campuses evaluating instructional effectiveness in the online environment, and using this information to inform performance evaluations, tenure, and promotion processes if applicable?

A: This is not clear yet. Some states are highly unionized, and unions will play a role. Other universities will waive performance evaluations and promotions to another time or give faculty the option of deferral. Universities with a large online presence may already have policies in place. Due to the local context of performance, there won’t be one process that is a best practice.

Q: How do we get faculty up to speed who do not have strong prior experience in delivering courses online?

A: During the webinar, Dr. Ptaszynski recommended that communication with faculty should be “essential, but detailed.” Limit the scope of information to what faculty might need for this emergency situation, rather than longer-term course redesign issues. The UNC System guide provides guidance for commonly used classroom practices (e.g., lecture, small group discussion, assessment, student presentations) regardless of the technology faculty use, while also suggesting a limited number of technologies that could be used to address each specific problem of practice. At the University of Hawaii System, the first thing faculty are asked to do is download a checklist. Faculty can then access “mini lessons” for moving their courses online that can be completed asynchronously as well as consultation with instructional designers for those faculty who need extra support.

Q: How do we implement inclusive pedagogy to help students with diverse learning needs achieve success in online courses?

A: This is an admirable goal and one that is expected in a high-quality online course. Since most professors already know their students from the face-to-face work, they should use their previous insights on class needs to personalize the teaching. It is unlikely that this will be part of the expectation for the remainder of this semester.

Q: How are campus leaders making decisions about academic policies that need to be adjusted in response to this crisis (e.g., number of courses that can be pass/fail and count toward a student’s credential)? How does this digital transition affect accreditation requirements?

A: This is a difficult issue, given the large number of academic policies in place at most institutions. Decisions about what policies should be suspended, relaxed, or kept consistent should be handled at the institution level in collaboration with the faculty senate. Whatever policies change during the emergency may need to be re-written again once conditions return to normal unless a specific timeframe, sunset date, or other condition (e.g., while a state of emergency has been declared in the state) are indicated.

Most accreditors recognize the emergency and are planning to revisit any concerns of quality later. But the longer the crisis continues, the more accreditors will need to weigh in on acceptable quality.
Q: How should we allay the privacy and security concerns of students, faculty, and staff, that may arise through use of online platforms?

A: Each university has a Chief Security Officer within the office of the CIO. It’s important to talk with that security officer to evaluate the risks of using consumer versions of products and potential impacts on university policies related to privacy and security, including FERPA, HIPAA, ADA compliance, and document retention rules. Enterprise or “pro” versions of these technology products, if available, may be more secure than the consumer versions.

**Additional Resources**

**Faculty Guides (from the Panelists)**
- [Moving to Alternative Instructional Formats (UNC System)]
- [Teaching During an Emergency (UH System)]

**Virtual Labs**
- [North American Network of Science Labs Online (NANSLO)]
- [Crowdsourced list of virtual labs organized by discipline — shared with APLU by Colorado State University]

**Open Educational Resources (OER)**
- [Pittsburg Library Guide to OER](many libraries have similar resources)
- [MERLOT]

**Accessibility**
- [Getting Started with Closed Captioning (Zoom)]
- [Creating Accessible Online Content (University of Maryland)]
- [Using Microsoft Translator in a PPT Presentation]
- [APLU Webpage of University COVID-19 Communications Websites]
- [APLU List of University Webpages on COVID-19’s Impact on Teaching and Learning]