


## **MEMORANDUM**

August 28, 2020

**TO:** Faculty and Staff

**FROM:** Christine W. Curtis   
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

**SUBJECT:** Enhancing Learning Outcomes

With the first full week of classes complete, I hope that you and your students are finding meaningful ways to engage in our new mode of operation. The purpose of this communication is to stress the importance of ensuring that remote sections and online courses have the same learning experience and academic integrity as traditional courses, and to provide guidance toward that end.

When transitioning instruction from a traditional in-class delivery to a hybrid, remote, or fully online method, it is important to ensure that students learn the same material and have the same access to high-quality instruction. Indeed, this is a core standard that is required and evaluated by our accrediting body, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). In order to help with the transition, the Enhanced Teaching and Learning (ETL) experts have provided some suggestions on ways faculty can help students achieve the same learning outcomes while using different delivery methods.

### **You Don't Have To Do It Alone**

Every week on Wednesday and Thursday at 2 pm, ETL hosts a time to talk to others on campus about teaching in new modalities. On Wednesday, join us for "**Teach Talk**" to explore considerations and suggestions related to teaching in hybrid and online modalities. Bring your successes and challenges to discuss with others who are facing the same situations you are. On Thursday, join your colleagues for "**Tool Talk**", a mixture of open Q&A and scheduled tool demonstrations that help you build the bridge between teaching and learning.

### **Multiple Points of Engagement**

Students need to interact with the course, each other, and the instructor. In online courses, students no longer have the classroom experience to engage with each other, and, while in hybrid courses, their interactions are limited. The multiple points of engagement can take many different forms: videos, discussion prompts, homework assignments, quizzes, Zoom lectures, collaborative projects, etc. They do not have to be synchronous.

## **Organized Course Structure**

The course needs to have continuity in design and structure to allow the student to navigate to the learning activities quickly and easily. In Canvas, this navigation is accomplished through the use of modules. Modules organize your course content in a linear progression and provide a simple, step-by-step sequence for your students to follow.

## **Defined Goals**

Learning objectives clearly state the material the student is learning and are necessary to keep the students motivated. By demonstrating how each part of the course links back to the objective, the student is reminded their efforts are for a purpose. The course itself and each course module should each have a goal(s) associated with it.

## **Clear Information**

Students must achieve a certain level of self-sufficiency in the course to remain engaged and be motivated to succeed. To do this, they must have clear and concise guidelines on how to operate. Many operational aspects, particularly communication, must be defined in advance by the instructor to insure the expectations of the students are set correctly. Students crave clear, frequent, and accurate communication from their instructors.

## **Formative Assessment Strategies**

In class, we have the opportunity to easily gauge student learning by asking questions and delivering quizzes. We use these formative assessment strategies to check student understanding of important topics. And we use the feedback from these assessments to adjust the speed and depth at which we teach. These activities also engage students and hold them accountable for their academic performance. In an online environment, you need to design formative assessments to check understanding, just as you would ask a question in class.

## **Using Rubrics**

The use of rubrics provides students with a clear understanding of how they will be evaluated on an assignment and provides a tool to facilitate a consistent grading practice. A common student complaint is that instructions for an assignment were unclear. Rubrics provide an opportunity to communicate expectations in advance and reduce student questions later. Using an assignment rubric also provides a performance benchmark for each student. This benchmark can be used to determine academic progress in the course and compare a student's academic performance with their peers.

## **Using Collaborative Tools**

Using tools such as Canvas, Zoom, and Google Drive for collaborative activities is a great way to engage students with each other outside of the classroom. Online learning should not mean learning alone. Canvas has a built-in message board system (called "Discussions") which can be used for formal or informal communication, and can be used as a graded or ungraded assignment. Canvas also allows faculty to create groups for more intimate discussions and assignment collaboration. Group assignments may be assigned a group grade, or the instructor may select to

provide individual grades to each group member. Zoom allows for real-time conferencing and discussions when students are available to meet synchronously. Google Drive offers user-friendly tools for document sharing and revision management. Google Drive is especially convenient for collaborative writing assignments.

### **Planning for Special Needs**

Not all students have the same access to technology and high-speed internet from off-campus. Accommodating for these differences can help level the playing field for students, and helps to avoid unfairly rewarding those students who have greater access. More students have access to smartphones and cellular data service than have access to computers and high-speed wired internet access. Therefore, faculty should check whether their Canvas course and all instructional materials are mobile-friendly. Canvas has a dedicated app for teachers and one for students. Panopto also has a mobile app available to faculty and students. In addition to having mobile-friendly content, faculty can make sure that the instructional content can be downloaded and viewed offline.

### **Academic Integrity Tools**

Faculty at UAH have tools available to help ensure academic integrity. Turnitin is a plagiarism detection software that compares student papers against a database of published sources and submitted student assignments from around the globe. Turnitin integrates directly with Canvas and provides a report for each student submission. For online exams, Respondus Monitor is available for electronic proctoring. Respondus Monitor automatically detects students looking away from the computer screen and provides a video for instructors to review suspicious exam-taking behaviors. Respondus Monitor requires the use of a webcam and computer.

### **Assistance Available**

The ETL staff stands ready to assist you. Please see their website <https://www.uah.edu/etl> for information about teaching online resources. You may request assistance by contacting [helpdesk@uah.edu](mailto:helpdesk@uah.edu).

Cc: Darren Dawson, President