PFFAC Tip Sheet:

Lessons Learned and Recommendations from Term 1

With Term 2 just around the corner, the Planning for Fall *Adhoc* Committee (PFFAC) has reconvened to produce a Tip Sheet enumerating the lessons learned from teaching online in Term 1. The following recommendations were informed by the results of the Undergraduate Students Midterm Check-In Survey, two Faculty Experience Sharing Workshops on online teaching and learning, a student Town Hall, individual student meetings, and a brainstorming session by the PFFAC. Key takeaways are listed below, with details provided in the following pages. We hope that the following suggestions for concrete actions will help to ensure a seamless transiton of our Term 2 courses to an online modality and help to provide a successful learning environment for undergraduate students in the Faculty of Forestry.

Key Takeaways:

1. Redesign courses using a blended mode
2. Coordinate with teaching team and students to balance respective workloads
3. Provide a consistent, easy-to-follow structure
4. Enable communications between / among teaching team and students
5. Be flexible, compassionate, and kind
6. Familiarize the teaching team and students with technologies

1. Course Redesign:

- Start early and think ahead. Allow adequate time for course planning and technology training.
- Redesign the course syllabus, course content, and assessments such that they are conducive to a good online learning experience (refer to Syllabus Best Practices Tip Sheet). Merely transposing a face-to-face course to the synchronous format does not seem to work well.
- Avoid using multiple tools and technologies in one course. Stick to the technologies that work best for the course to reduce stress for both instructors and students.
- Minimize the length of the pre-recorded asynchronous videos (no more than 20 minutes) and make sure the videos are clear, logically presented, and stick to one major topic. Synchronous sessions are vital for creating community, but try not to exceed the originally scheduled class times for synchronous lecture recordings (ie, 50 to 80 minutes).
- Use the embedded quiz function in Kaltura (see tutorials in Kaltura Workshop Presentation) or create post-lecture Canvas quizzes to track if students watch the pre-recorded lectures.
- In order to increase attendance in synchronous sessions, go through sample exam questions with students (providing suggested answers) and prepare highlights of these lectures.
- If necessary and scheduling allows, think about offering augmented evening hours (Instructor and/or TAs). Record all synchronous sessions to accommodate different time zones and scheduling conflicts, and allow students to review these materials even if they were able to watch the session live.
- Redesign course assessments by taking into account flexibility and academic integrity. Some have found that open book exams and/or question banks with randomized questions and answers work well (i.e., not using Proctorio or a lockdown browser). Be mindful of the potential difficulty of open-book exams, and make sure that the exam questions are rigorous, but not overly complex.
- Consider making assessments available throughout a 24 hour window. For 24 hour exam windows, be flexible and provide extra attempts for students for when they encounter technical issues (refer to the Tipsheet for Giving Extra Attempts and Time in Canvas Quizzes).
- Where possible, provide detailed and constructive feedback on assessments to enhance student learning.
- Create course group work in a flexible, cooperative manner, rather than requiring students to collaborate simultaneously at fixed times. For example, group work can comprise divvying up tasks for larger projects and working independently on those tasks. As much as possible, encourage peer-review and self-review in group work. Practice flexibility with group work, noting that having groups across different time zones may result in delays.

- For courses with lab instruction and activities, consider moving away from concentrating on teaching the *how to's* of procedural lab calculations and experimental steps, and instead opt for creating learning activities related to:
    - critically reviewing literature and reading peer-reviewed journals;
    - analyzing experimental data;
    - proposing new scientific experiments and designing complex research experiments;
    - explaining their experiments to peers.

2. Course Workload:

- Program Directors should coordinate with Instructors (at the Program level) to ensure that workloads are spread fairly across all courses for a given year.
- While there is no policy at UBC for the number of hours that a course requires, a good guideline is that the weekly workload for a 3-credit course should not exceed **8** hours, including all activities related to classroom/lab instruction, learning, and assessment. Instructors may create optional materials and activities for those students who are willing and/or able to put more effort into their studies.
- A Student Workload Estimator (UBC-O Estimator or WFU Workload Estimator) enables instructors to estimate students' time commitments in their courses based on the assigned learning activities.
- Maintain a good balance of providing virtual office hours and timely personal learning support with the help of TAs. Plan a good balance of workload with TAs.

3. Course Consistency:

- Be creative in course development and design as each course has its own blend of pedagogical approaches to meet the intended learning outcomes. However, providing a consistent pattern and easy to navigate learning spaces can greatly improve the learning experience.
- Set up a similar structure with the key components and necessary resources within the Canvas course site(s). A Canvas course template with a structured homepage may help. Consider using the Canvas template developed by UBC CTLT and the Faculty of Forestry by enrolling to https://canvas.ubc.ca/enroll/LJN4FD and contacting the Teaching and Learning Support team (michelle.zeng@ubc.ca) for assistance.
- Establish a regular weekly schedule and stick to the planned schedule even if it means one week contains a little less content, while the next week may have a little more. Discuss the structure explicitly with students at the beginning of the course, including recommendations for ways to keep up with the material and an estimate of how much time activities should take.
- Keep a central place (course calendar) for viewing the action items in courses. Add 'to do' dates to discussions or individual pages in Canvas to alert students about tasks, discussions, and/or readings. Add 'due dates' to assignments, so that they automatically appear in the course calendar.
- Send weekly reminders through the Canvas course announcement that directly link to students' emails (although students may turn off the Canvas notifications).

4. Course Communications:

- Elaborate clearly the expectations of the course to the students, frequently, and in different formats (syllabi, reminders during synchronous sessions, emails, etc.), and always check with students to see if they understand what they are expected to do.
- Acknowledge students' difficulties during the pandemic explicitly in the course syllabus or the Canvas course homepage.
- Enable communications within the course, including baseline pre-course surveys on technologies and time zones, midterm check-ins, general Q&A threads on the Canvas discussion board, and/or external communication tools (Piazza, Padlet, MS Team, etc.).
- Build a sense of community with peer supported channels and virtual study rooms. Enhance communication and collaboration among students by assigning teams and using breakout groups during class. Students are generally more willing to share their thoughts within small groups.
- Respond to students' questions and requests promptly, especially for the sequential assignments that students require feedback on to further develop / improve subsequent assignments.
- Open dedicated discussion boards for topics that may fall outside of the learning outcomes, for example, book recommendations, job opportunities, and topics that sparked conversations in class.
- Utilize functions in Zoom or Collaburate Ultra during synchronous classes, perhaps using a TA to help with the monitoring. Useful functions include: polls, chats, annotation, and breakout groups. Set communications guidelines during the first teaching session, especially with regards to respectful classroom behaviour.
- Bring the world to the virtual classroom, for example:
    - Assign a nature journal as a replacement for field trip.
    - Incorporate students' current locations and contexts into teaching and discussions.
- Where possible and if appropriate, engage students using humour and a touch of informality to all teaching materials.

5. Flexibility and Kindness:

- Be flexible and try to accommodate students' varying needs with respect to participating in course activities and assessments.
- Be realistic, nimble, and willing to adjust the workload for students, instructors, and TAs.

6. Training on Technology:
   - Familiarize the teaching team and students with Canvas and the online teaching tools in advance (make sure to include technological training hours into TAs' work hours).
   - Provide guidelines and resources for students, such as those found on the UBC Keep Learning site.
   - Reach out to the Teaching and Learning Support Team (through michelle.zeng@ubc.ca or https://teachingsupport.forestry.ubc.ca/get-help/) in the Faculty of Forestry and UBC CTLT / LTHub for support:
     - If students need technical assistance, have them contact the IT Service Centre Help Desk, or phone 604.822.2008 for urgent issues.
     - If Faculty and Staff need support on teaching and learning tools, submit a request to LT Hub at lt.hub@ubc.ca.