Designing Fall 2020 Courses: Tips for MIT Faculty

WELCOME*

Planning for Fall 2020 will likely be significantly different from previous cycles of course development. This document is meant to be a resource for faculty engaging in that work while connecting with the numerous virtual resources available across MIT. Before continuing you should take a moment to review the [Emergency Academic Regulations and Policies](#). What follows are tips, advice, and resources to help as you plan and develop Fall 2020 courses. This work is [grounded in research](#) and supported by [evidence from our own community](#). This guide aims to:

- Help you consider the content and assessment structures of your course

- Consider and select the modalities and pedagogies for the course

- Connect you with MIT related resources

---

1) ESTABLISH COURSE GOALS, CONTENT, & COMMUNITY

It is almost impossible to recreate residential work in an online structure. Instead you might…

Start by reworking your course goals to take advantage of remote instruction affordances:

- Ask yourself and the instructional team "What are the most important things my students should know and be able to do when done with my course?" and structure the course content to align with the answer to that question.

- Regularly present the course goals to students and connect the individual modules and course content to them.

- Utilize [remote](#) [tools](#) and materials that promote interaction between instructors-students, students-students, and TAs-students as they engage with content.

Consider assessments as opportunities to learn

- Having frequent low-stakes assessments distributed over the course of the semester that are paired with feedback can provide instructors with an understanding of student comprehension and allow students to reflect on their own learning trajectory while working to reduce anxiety.

- Projects, papers, case analyses, performances, presentations, and other non-exam assessments allow students to demonstrate complex understanding and application of concepts.

Create opportunities to [build a community of learners](#)

- Consider how course activities can be reworked to allow students to come together virtually (via discussion board, synchronous problem-solving session, Zoom breakout rooms, Slack channel, group projects) to collaborate and learn together. These social learning opportunities are a key part of learning that happens on campus and can be supported remotely.

---

*Portions of this document were adapted from Open Learning materials and the Harvard Guidelines for Fall Course Design

2) ENGAGING LEARNERS

Modalities range from asynchronous to synchronous: Consider what the correct mix of this will look like for your content and the way you want students to engage in learning.

- o Asynchronous materials and videos can be a powerful resource that students can revisit and engage with when they are most ready to learn.

  - ▪ Stand-alone long lectures often do not result in the desired content retention. Breaking up these recordings with opportunities for active engagement (i.e. embedding questions into the video or asking students to post a response to a prompt on discussion board) can produce better learning outcomes.

  - ▪ Provide students opportunities to check their understanding of asynchronously delivered materials and reflect on how that understanding is connected with course goals.

- o Take advantage of the limited Synchronous sessions to offer students the opportunity to actively engage with course content instead of simply passively receiving information.

- o Create synchronous and asynchronous sessions that can be engaged with by all members of the class. Provide opportunities for questions, co-engagement with content (i.e. group problem solving), and checking for individual and group understanding.

- o Build in a mix of modalities that build on and complement one another. How can you reinforce content explored during a synchronous discussion session with questions in an asynchronous discussion forum or vice versa? Providing students with multiple opportunities to engage with course content can deepen their understanding and provide a more equitable learning experience.

Set clear and consistent expectations for students:

- o It can be helpful to set routines around the modalities, activities, and assignments in the course. Make sure student know what to expect out of each type of session, how they will need to prepare in order to effectively engage, and how what they do will be connected with course expectations. For example, letting students know when TAs will be available for live Q&A on slack can promote better and more regular engagement. At the same time, setting clear due dates for when students should complete asynchronous assignments will increase the likelihood that they keep pace with the material.

Pedagogy ahead of tools:

- o Build your course to take advantage of good pedagogy and student engagement strategies ahead of trying to utilize every technology available. Using just a handful of key features in tools like Canvas and Zoom can allow for the enactment of good pedagogy.

- o Effective online pedagogies share many similarities with quality residential approaches and are centered on getting students to actively and critically engage with content.

---

3) LOTS OF SUPPORTS EXIST

- o Colleagues (including TAs and Admins) from your department make up a vital community to help share ideas, create materials, and enact high quality instruction.

- o Many departments have digital learning lab (DLL) scientists and fellows who have extensive experience in this type of work and can engage in conversations with individuals and departments.

- o Links to supports from TLL and OL can be found on the next page.

MIT-Related Resources:

- o Teaching and Learning Lab (TLL) Get Ready to Teach Remote Course: https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/5377

- o TA Days Canvas site: https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/5293

- o MIT Canvas Resources Course: https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/3156

- o IS&T: https://ist.mit.edu/

- o Science of Remote Learning: https://openlearning.mit.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/TheScienceofRemoteLearning.pdf

- o Residential Digital Innovations: https://openlearning.mit.edu/mit-faculty/residential-digital-innovations

- o Emergency Academic Regulations: https://facultygovernance.mit.edu/message-chair

- o Student Resource (Best Practices for Learning Remotely): https://learnremote.mit.edu/

- o Tops for Supporting and Working with Students During the COVID-19 Crisis: For MIT Faculty, Instructors, and Staff developed by MIT's Division of Student Life.