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Pro Tips

Advice from your colleagues and some experts

Pro Tip #1: Fostering student participation

Create a welcoming virtual classroom

- Talk frankly with students about challenges and ask them to let you know if they are frustrated by or struggling with instruction in a virtual environment.
- Ask students what they need; create a space where you can model and they can practice self-advocacy skills.
- Create alternative assignments to accommodate student schedules and internet access problems

Engage student participation differently than you would in person

- Shorten your real-time sessions - use real-time for brief check-ins, for group Q&A, or trouble-shooting
- Create discussion groups, and ask students to discuss a topic, question, or problem before the real-time session, and then have one or two students from each group present during the real-time session.

Pro Tip #2: The welcoming classroom

Worried about inappropriate behavior?

- Recording and sharing Zoom sessions outside of class
 - Ask your students to develop ground rules for recording and sharing Zoom sessions outside the class, and what they need to feel safe participating.
 - Students are likely to conclude that sharing class videos with outsiders is not okay on their own. Students may be more likely to abide by rules created by their peers.
 - If they don't remind them that recording without permission is, in fact, illegal in California.
- Help your students feel safe working together
 - Talk frankly with students about the importance of working together to create a comfortable virtual classroom, and ask them to tell you if they are frustrated by or struggling with instruction in a virtual environment.

Zoom-bombing and other in class misbehavior

- You can prevent Zoom-bombing by uninvited guests by changing your SDSU Zoom Account Settings to [Enable Waiting Room](#) (this will give you control over who joins your Zoom meeting), and restricting screen sharing to **Only Host**.

- If a student is doing or something inappropriate during a meeting, you can also [disable their video, mute them, or place an attendee on hold](#).
- It's also a good idea to create unique Zoom meeting IDs for each course and for your office hours, instead of using your default Personal Meeting ID. You do this when you create the meeting.
- For more information on Zoom settings, go to ITS's Zoom FAQs https://it.sdsu.edu/security/protect/zoom_protection.aspx

Pro Tip #3: Try incremental assignments

Incremental assignments foster engagement and reduce cheating

- Use small assignments to:
 - keep students engaged with your course material and on schedule to finish the term
 - provide a schedule and routine -- which some students find very reassuring, and the experts say is vital to making a virtual classroom work
 - let you check to see who is active, and who may be falling behind
 - define topics for office hours, real-time sessions, and asynchronous discussions
 - reduce student stress while still teaching them the most important material or skills in this course
 - teach students time management strategies

What kinds of incremental assignments work?

- Embed short quizzes in recorded lectures
- Dividing large tests into short, weekly homework assignments, quizzes, or smaller tests
- Dividing big projects into their incremental steps

Are you worried about cheating?

- Students may be less likely to cheat on lower-stakes assignments
- You will have more data about student performance, so you may be more able to spot unusually high grades that might indicate cheating

Are you worried about equity?

- Data reveals that the vast majority of students are more successful in in-person classes than in virtual classrooms, but most students do better in virtual classrooms that have at least some real-time component. Your students will do better if you have at least some synchronous, video-conferencing activities and requirements.
- Contact students who have missed assignments or real-time sessions - don't wait for them to get far behind.
- Ask students if they need help, and encourage them to ask what they need. SDSU is trying to make support services and equipment available for students.
- Want to dive into equity in the virtual classroom, take a look at this [recorded presentation](#) by Dr. Luke Wood and Dr. Frank Harris III.

Pro Tip #4: Equity in the virtual classroom

Not all students have computers, internet, and quiet workspaces. Covid-19 means that some students are caring for family-members, homeschooling children, out of work, or working demanding hours. This is hard for us; it is hard for them, too.

Help your students succeed by offering alternatives

- Discussion boards or recorded presentations are pretty good alternatives for students who can't participate in real-time discussions
- Essays or alternative problem sets might substitute for timed, multiple choice exams for students with weak internet, schedule conflicts, or who are living in another time-zone

Be transparent

- Tell students what they need to do to be successful in your class: Remind them how to approach readings or homework, take and organize notes, and prepare for exams

Be intrusive and flexible

- Data reveal that the vast majority of students are more successful in in-person classes than in virtual classrooms, but most students do better in virtual classrooms that have at least some real-time component. Your students will do better if you have at least some synchronous, video-conferencing activities and requirements.
- **Being intrusive** means contacting students who have missed assignments or real-time sessions - don't wait for them to get far behind. Ask students if they need help, and encourage them to ask what they need. SDSU is trying to make support services and equipment available for students.
- **Being flexible** means reducing penalties for late work. Consider telling them that they have to ask for extensions, but that you will grant them if they do ask. This may help them get better at asking for what they need.

Want to dive into equity in the virtual classroom, take a look at this [recorded presentation](#) by Dr. Luke Wood and Dr. Frank Harris III.

Pro Tip #5: Managing your own workload: Grading

Shifting from face-to-face to virtual classrooms has increased faculty workloads. So, how can you promote student engagement, limit cheating, foster equity, and not burn out?

Do what you **need** to do, but not what you don't

- Give less feedback, or only give feedback in virtual office hours.
- Use rubrics: Save time by keeping rubrics short, simple, and focused on the most important grading criteria
- Give students full credit for completing the assignments that don't require feedback. This is particularly useful if you've divided a large project into many smaller assignments.
- Give feedback only to those students who have looked at your feedback on earlier assignments. Turnitin shows you this.

- Be transparent about the choices you are making, and explain why you are making them. If you do limit your feedback on student work, consider offering virtual office hours to provide feedback for those students who want it.

Pro Tip #6: Online final exams - design and implementation

Prepare a Plan B for students who have technical problems. Giving synchronous exams? Keep to the exam schedule.

Test whatever is most central to goals for the course

- You don't need to test everything; sometimes you just need students to review everything.
- It's not too late to substitute smaller, lower-stakes assignments for your high-stakes final

Re-using questions from past semesters?

- If you re-use questions from past semesters, double-check to make sure you covered everything this semester.
- Change question wording to make it harder for students to find questions and answers on the internet.

Online exam design

- **Multiple choice tests** - create big, randomized pools of questions by sharing homework and sample questions, or by asking students to write questions as part of exam review.
- **Tests that include charts, graphs or other visuals** – test can be added to Blackboard- and Canvas-based tests. Keep laptops' small screens in mind.
- **Tests that require students to draw schematics or share their work** – students can hand-write their exams, photograph their papers, and send you these images by email or through Blackboard/Canvas.

Research and Group Projects

- Consider a research proposal instead.
- If your final project normally include building something, create alternative, design-focused assignments for groups that really cannot build.
- Have students record videos of test trials of models or machines.

Pro Tip #7: Exams – academic honesty

High stress can leave to cheating—how can you support academic honesty?

Use big pools of questions

- Blackboard can assign large pools of questions randomly, so each student's test is unique.
- Increase your question pool by asking colleagues if they are willing to share homework or sample questions. Or ask students to write questions as a required exam review.

- Change wording of all questions enough to make them harder for students to find on the internet

Add written or oral questions to double-check conceptual understanding

- Adding a short answer question or an oral defense on each major concept can reveal who really understands the material.
- Require students to hand-write calculations, schematics or outlines, and send you a photograph of that work via email or Blackboard/Canvas.
- Big class? Only interview or read answers from students in the top third of the class, or who performed differently on the final and earlier tests.

It is true that students are under pressure and could really use some flexibility right now. But if you are concerned about academic honesty, try these options:

- In Blackboard, set **time limits** for the exam, **prohibit backtracking**, and **display one question at a time**.
- Create a **large pool** of questions, and set Blackboard to assign them randomly.
- Set Blackboard to **automatically submit** exams at a designated time. But don't forget you need a Plan B in case students or Blackboard have trouble.
- Define cheating out of your exam - make your exam an open-note test. Or reduce the opportunity and incentive to cheat by assigning students to solve exam questions in small groups.

If you come up with a good solution, share it.

Remember: it's okay to change your syllabus, or change your exam design. Just give students a chance to practice before high stakes finals.

Pro Tip #8: Discussion and Group Work in Virtual Space

During CTL Coffee Hours, some of our colleagues mentioned that students are quieter in virtual classrooms than in face-to-face classes. So, I'm back again with another guide to transitioning to virtual instruction!

First some generalizations:

1. Whenever possible, provide opportunities for students to "participate" asynchronously.

Why? Some of your students are now in other time zones. Others may not have a quiet place to work, or are caring for family members. Others may find video conferencing uncomfortable. And we are all stressed and busy and baffled.
2. Teaching virtually requires structure, flexibility, accountability and transparency.
 - a. Structure: Try to make classes predictable, so your students know when to listen and when to discuss.
 - b. Flexibility: Try to make room for students' busy, stressed lives.
 - c. Accountability: If you want students to participate, require (and grade) participation. But create a variety of ways for them to participate.

- d. Transparency: Going virtual requires changing your course and your syllabus. Just tell your students what you are changing and why.
3. Manage your own workload so you don't burn out. Your lectures don't need to be perfect, and you don't need to respond to every email right away.

Step 1: Identify your goals

Start by reviewing your goals for your course and how you use student participation in your face-to-face class. This will help you pick a good mix of real-time and asynchronous participation.

- A. Are you asking students questions to check their comprehension of in class material?
- B. Are you asking them to apply what they are learning to a case study, problem set, or past content?
- C. Are you checking if they're keeping up with reading or other homework?
- D. Are you trying to vary your instructional methods?

Step 2: What kinds of participation must take place during Zoom class sessions

If you are lecturing, you'll want students to ask questions when they don't understand something. But other types of participation lend themselves to other solutions.

- A. Try using Blackboard Discussion Board to collect questions about lecture, or to prompt students to relate homework to lecture. During lecture, have students submit questions to Chat; take breaks during lecture to read and respond to the Chat, or ask students to answer each others' questions on Chat.
- B. Use Zoom breakout sessions for small-group discussions applying lecture and homework. Asynchronous small group discussion can take in a drop-in Zoom room, or a Blackboard discussion board.
- C. Use the Zoom poll, and a yes/no functions for quizzes, or set up short Blackboard quizzes to nudge students to keep up with homework.
- D. Vary instructional methods with break-out rooms; short, ungraded writing assignments; or videos from other sources.

For help with Blackboard, see <https://its.sdsu.edu/docs/SDSU-Blackboard-Quickstart-Guide.pdf>

For help with Zoom, see [Guide to Educating Through Zoom](#) and [Tips for Teachers Educating on Zoom](#)

Implement: Set the stage and explain your expectations

1. Going virtual is like starting the semester afresh. So, if you haven't already, take a class session to explain how your virtual classroom will work.
 - o How will each class be structured each day?
 - o How do you want students to participate -- by chat or by talking?
 - o Do you want them to have video and microphone on or off?
 - o What alternative, asynchronous participation are you offering? For whom?

- Where should students send questions, and when will you respond?
 - When and how will you send regular communications (reviews, updates, assignments)?
2. Set up your Blackboard Discussion Boards, mess about with Zoom's polling and break out rooms, and give them a try.

Remember, this is new to almost all of us. It's okay to experiment. It's okay to change your syllabus. And it's okay if you and your students take a while to get into the new groove.

Pro Tip #9: More on academic honesty

Studies show that students are **most likely to cheat** on high stakes assignments, when they don't think they can succeed or have enough time, and when they are unhappy with a course. They are **less likely to engage in academic dishonesty** on low-stakes assignments, if they expect cheating will be difficult, and when faculty talk positively about academic honesty and explicitly about what is and is not cheating. Asking them to read detailed honor codes before taking exams also seems to help.

Don't look for a technical fix. Design your course to reduce cheating:

- Integrate some community-building activities into your classes to help your students feel welcome, and give them an emotional stake in the class.
- Substitute multiple, low-stakes quizzes for your large, high-stakes exams.
- Create ungraded assignments similar to exam problems so students can practice for tests, evaluate their own understanding, and figure out when to seek help.
- Tell your students if you do not use textbook test-banks. This may discourage them from seeking answers on the internet.
- Define what kinds of collaboration are and are not acceptable on your assignments. Ask students to list their collaborators on each assignment.
- Ask your students to read a detailed honor code before high stakes assignments; honor codes that include consequences and are more formal and substantial seem to make the biggest impression.

Sources: Bretag, T., Harper, R., Burton, M., Ellis, C., Newton, P., van Haeringen, K., Saddiqi, S., & Rozenberg, P. (2019). "Contract cheating and assessment design: Exploring the relationship." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 44(5), 676-691. Munoz, A., & Mackway, J. (2019). "An online testing design choice typology towards cheating threat minimization." *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 16(3). Gurung, R. A. R., Wilhelm, T. M., & Filz, T. (2012). "Optimizing honor codes for online exam administration." *Ethics & Behavior*, 22(2), 158-162. Rettinger, D. A. (2017). "The role of emotions and attitudes in causing and preventing cheating." *Theory Into Practice*, 56(2) 103-110.