



Academic Planning for H1N1: Strategies for Instructors at the University of Toronto

As noted in the recent PDAD&C Memo (#8, dated 7 August 2009; <http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/public/pdadc/200910/8.htm>), the University strongly urges all instructors to “plan for potential situations in which students, instructors, and teaching assistants miss a number of classes/labs/community placements or are unable to complete/mark assignments due to illness.” Given that this planning will likely require instructors to make changes to their course to accommodate any disruptions, instructors are advised to consider contingency plans now as they finalize the arrangements for the delivery of their courses.

In the event that our community is affected by H1N1, it is possible that one of several scenarios may impact your courses. You may find that several of your students are ill or are caring for ill dependents and require individual accommodation to ensure that they are able to continue with their course work. You may fall ill and require alternative means of communicating with your students or of administering class activities. Finally, in a severe outbreak, it may be necessary for the institution to cancel one or more class sessions in which case you might adopt alternative modes of continuing course instruction. In each of these scenarios it may become necessary to adapt the delivery and administration of classes and related academic procedures (e.g. lectures/seminars/labs, assignments, grading, etc.). This might most readily be done through technological means, some of which may benefit from early consideration.

The Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI)*, in consultation with colleagues from across the University, will work to assist instructors in the creation of contingency plans. We have developed a range of strategies that faculty may use in preparation for and/or during any disruption on our campuses. CTSI will continue to update these resources over the coming weeks and we encourage faculty to visit the University’s Preparedness website regularly for new information (<http://www.preparedness.utoronto.ca/pandemic.htm>).

*[*The Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation (CTSI) was created in July 2009 through the amalgamation of the Office of Teaching Advancement (OTA), including the Teaching Assistants’ Training Program (TATP), and the Resource Centre for Academic Technology (RCAT). CTSI provides leadership in teaching and learning at the University of Toronto and provides support for pedagogy and pedagogy-driven instructional technology for all teaching staff and graduate teaching assistants across all of the university’s campuses and divisions.]*

PRE-COURSE PLANNING

Instructors should speak with their departments/divisions prior to the start of their class regarding policies pertaining to the administration of courses (e.g. grading and grade reporting policies including important dates, procedures relating to instructor absences, etc.).

Instructors should consider the following as they work toward finalizing their plans for courses to be delivered in the upcoming academic year:

Course Syllabus:

- Be sure to have a course syllabus prepared in advance of your first class meeting. CTSI staff are available to assist in the development of course/instructor policies that align with institutional policies. See also the CTSI tip sheet on developing a course syllabus at: <http://www.utoronto.ca/ota/resources/teachingissues/DevelopingCourseOutlines.pdf>
- Post the syllabus on your course site (e.g. Blackboard) to ensure that students have ongoing access to this important document.
- Consider appropriate policies that may facilitate the administration of a course during student or instructor absences or class cancellations. In particular, you may wish to develop or adapt policies about:
 - *Excused absences.* Some instructors assign a portion of the course grade based on participation or attendance, or will not accept late assignments except for a verified medical emergency. Please keep in mind that during a pandemic students may be asked *not* to visit the doctor's office unless their illness is especially severe, and therefore may not be able to obtain a doctor's note documenting their illness. You may wish to develop alternative policies for participation, absences or late submission of assignments that do not require verification of illness.
 - *Assignment submissions.* During a pandemic students may have limited access to campus because of illness or other disruptions. Consider whether you wish to allow for alternative means of submitting assignments. Your policies can clarify acceptable modes of submission (e.g. in person, by email, through Turnitin) and any additional details or requirements about each mode. For example, if you will be accepting assignments by email, you might want to specify acceptable document formats.
 - *Communication.* Policies about means of communication can help ensure that students can reach you and that you can reach students quickly in the event of changes to course schedules or requirements and that students can receive course communication if absent. You may wish to develop a policy that clarifies your expectations for student access to communication from you – for example, you might consider including the requirement that students regularly (e.g. daily) check their UToronto email address or Blackboard for announcements.
- Turnitin
 - Turnitin incorporates a reliable means of accepting assignments electronically. Even if you don't plan to use Turnitin, including the Turnitin disclaimer on your course syllabus

would provide you with the option of using Turnitin to accept assignments electronically later in the semester. For more information on Turnitin, please see: <http://www.utoronto.ca/ota/turnitin/index.html>

- The Conditions of Use governing our Turnitin license, including the required syllabus statement, are available at: <http://www.utoronto.ca/ota/turnitin/ConditionsofUse.html>

Assignments & Grading:

- In the case of a substantial disruption due to H1N1 you may find that some or all of your class activities or assignments might be more conveniently administered remotely. Consider means of adapting assignments and activities so they can be delivered through alternative methods (see “Possible Teaching Strategies” below for some suggestions) should this become necessary. Identify whether these methods will require access to additional resources or information (e.g. technological solutions, student contact information). Most administrative and many pedagogical elements of the course can be managed through Blackboard (see below for a detailed listing of the range of tools available through Blackboard).
- CTSI staff members are available to provide support and resources to assist in the design, adaptation and implementation of assignments.
- Instructors are reminded of the University of Toronto Grading Practices Policy which states that "Student performance in a course shall be assessed on more than one occasion. No one essay, test, examination, etc. should have a value of more than 80% of the grade. " and "At least one piece of term work which is a part of the evaluation of a student performance, whether essay, lab report, review, etc., shall be returned to the student prior to the last date for withdrawal from the course without academic penalty." The inclusion of multiple points of evaluation allows for the possibility of dropping and re-weighting assignments if so required. Please keep in mind that the UofT Grading Practices Policy states that “after the methods of evaluation have been made known the instructor may not change them or their relative weight without the consent of at least a simple majority of the students enrolled in the course. Any changes shall be reported to the division or the department” (II.2 b). However, if a disruption to the academic program is declared more flexible procedures may be implemented.

Please see: <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/grading.htm> for the full Grading Practices Policy document.

Communication Strategies:

- Consider how you will communicate with the students in your class if you are ill or if large numbers of your students are ill. This might be through email or the communication tools on Blackboard. Identify the necessary information you or your students will need to be able to use these means of communication effectively (e.g. home access to a computer, email addresses, familiarity with Blackboard, etc.) and ensure that there is a plan in place to discuss this information with students early on in the course.

Identify Colleagues to Provide Instructional Assistance:

- As you review your course outline, identify colleagues or graduate students who might be able to act as a “substitute” for particular course topics. Make sure you have their contact information, and consider canvassing their interest and availability in filling this role, if necessary.
- In the case of an absence, you may also want to create a “substitute class plan” that another colleague could follow in the case of your absence. This plan could include a range of alternative learning activities and resources that do not demand any additional preparation on their part.

Key Contacts and Resources:

- Know who to contact in your department or division and what procedure to follow if you fall ill. Please also see “Resources” below for links to additional pedagogical and administrative support services.

BLACKBOARD-ABILITIES:

The institutionally-supported learning management system, Blackboard, includes a number of tools that can assist faculty in the delivery of course materials and content, can strengthen communication between and among instructors and students, and can enable a range of engagement strategies.

Within Blackboard, instructors are able to:

- Post course materials
- Post/link to readings
- Collect/Download/Mark/Return assignments
- Conduct discussions
- Create quizzes
- Connect students to library and departmental resources
- Send emails and materials
- Post announcements
- Conduct office hours
- Coordinate with teaching staff
- Provide group collaboration space
- Conduct office hours
- Coordinate with teaching staff

For best practices relating to the use of some of these Blackboard tools, please see:

<http://rcat.library.utoronto.ca/best-practices>

THE FIRST CLASS

Course Policies and Procedures:

- Spend some time in the first class communicating your course policies; including those (described above) that might be particularly relevant should students (or the instructor) fall ill.
- Identify the “key dates” in your course – assignment deadlines, major in-class activities, test dates, etc. Let students know how you will be communicating any changes to these dates (e.g. by email, through Blackboard). Please keep in mind the restrictions on changing grading procedures (as noted above and defined in the Grading Practices Policy).

Student Course Contacts:

- If you plan to communicate with students by email in the event of a disruption, you will need to collect student email addresses. If you collect student email addresses on the first day, make sure that you also obtain the email addresses of students who add the course after the first class. Keep in mind that students can also be contacted through Blackboard.
- Ask students to identify one or two peer contacts in the course and obtain their email address or phone number (if you wish, hand out a form or leave space on the syllabus for this purpose). Express that you hope that students will support each other (e.g. by communicating class announcements, sharing notes) in the event of absences but that it is the responsibility of the absent student to request such favours ahead of the missed class and to arrange for convenient means of obtaining the relevant information from their contact. If students do not wish to share this responsibility they should refrain from sharing their contact information.

Let students know that they will benefit by verifying that they have access to the following:

- Contact information of one or two other students in the course
- A computer that is not in a U of T lab – for example, in a residence room or at home
- UToronto email (not forwarded!!)
- Blackboard courses
- Online library resources
- Information on campus health services and pandemic information
- Also remind students to update contact information on ROSI and any other relevant system.

DURING THE COURSE

Information coming soon!

POSSIBLE TEACHING STRATEGIES

Online Learning Activities:

The following is a list of on-line activities that instructors can use to help supplement their courses in the case of cancelled lectures or large numbers of absent students.

If you plan to adopt a tool that you have not taught with before, such as a discussion board, it is recommended that you plan to use it, at least in some capacity, from the beginning of the term. This allows you and your students to become familiar with it early on, rather than requiring you to learn the tool during a class disruption. We also encourage you to contact CTSI staff for assistance in implementing any of the following tools or strategies.

Discussion-based Strategies

- **Jigsaw**

Jigsaw activities are characterized by learners within a “home group” specializing in one aspect of a topic of study and then presenting back to their peers. Students can also meet with members from other groups who are assigned the same aspect so that they become “experts”. They then return to their “home group” to teach the information to the other members in their group. The goal is that all home group members master all aspects of the topic of study. The group learning can take place in face-to-face conversations, or through online discussion forums or through more formalized writing, such as a paper or reflection. Jigsaw activities can provide opportunities for instructor, peer or self assessment.

Resources needed:

- Group discussion forums or assignment submission procedure
- Topics and guiding questions
- Access to appropriate resources and research materials

- **Group Presentation/Moderation**

Small groups prepare presentations and supporting materials as they would for a presentation in a face-to-face class but the presentation is done through a discussion forum over a longer time frame, i.e. a week. Presenters can also prepare a number of questions for their classmates to help generate discussion. A number of presentations can be conducted simultaneously in separate forums. Online collaboration space for each group allows the instructor to work with each group to help them cover the correct content and identify appropriate resources.

Resources needed:

- Group and class discussion forums
- Topics and guiding questions
- Access to appropriate resources and research materials

- **Ask an expert (or Question development)**

As a class or in small groups students develop questions for a guest lecturer. The activity can be conducted before or after a guest lecture, or for a fictitious or historical figure. A follow-up exercise could have the students researching and answering each others' questions or students could research and play the role of the expert.

This activity can also be a great way to include members of the community who cannot physically come to class, for reason of location or because of a disruption. The guest can record their presentation and send it to the instructor for distribution, the instructor can then send chosen questions to the guest, and post the responses back to the class.

Resources needed:

- Discussion forum
- A guest lecturer or expert

- **Study Guide Development**

Using a discussion forum students develop and answer questions they would expect to see on an exam. The instructor can also develop some sample questions to demonstrate the types of questions they are expecting. To help demonstrate the value of the activity the instructor can choose a handful of questions to use in an assessment.

Resources needed:

- Discussion forum

- **Structured Discussion**

A structured discussion generally sets somewhat formal expectations for student behaviour in terms of contributions. For example, instructors may ask for three substantive posts a week: one presenting a new idea, one refuting a peer's idea, and one supporting a peer's idea. Students contribute to topical or weekly-based discussions that tie in with lecture content and readings. Instructors can have prepared questions or topics to guide the conversation and generally facilitate the discussion rather than answer student inquiries.

Resources needed:

- Discussion forum

Other Strategies:

- **Independent Study/Research**

Using online communication tools (discussion forums, email, etc.) students work independently reviewing or researching topics. Instructors can interact with these students individually or in groups to help them connect what they are researching with course outcomes. Students can also ask questions and discuss topics with the instructor and peers electronically.

Resources needed:

- Access to research materials
- Communication tools to distribute instructions and answer questions

- **Virtual Office Hours**

Instructors, TAs or other teaching staff can provide assistance to or virtually meet with students via online communication tools without requiring a face-to-face meeting. Simple tools like email or a discussion forum allow ill students to send communication when they are capable, and synchronous chats allow instructors to still maintain their office hours.

Resources needed:

- Email, Discussion Forum, or Chat

OTHER TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS TO ASSIST INSTRUCTORS

A number of technological solutions will be made available for instructors to assist them in the delivery of their courses in the event of a disruption. More detailed information regarding how these options can best be used for teaching purposes is forthcoming. [Please note: there may be costs associated with some of these technologies. We recommend that you contact CTSI staff for more information prior to implementation.]

- **Audio-conferencing**

Instructors of small courses (with a maximum enrollment of 20) may wish to use the University of Toronto's audio-conferencing system. This allows instructors to conduct live discussions with students over the telephone. Participants are provided with a phone number to call through which they will be linked together for the group audio-conference. Please see: <http://www.telecomservices.utoronto.ca/services/bell.htm> for more information.

- **Webinars**

Webinars connect participants over the phone and provide shared access to the instructor's desktop (on which instructor's can show course materials, slides, etc.). Students will be provided with a phone number and web site address and access code to participate in a Webinar. It is recommended that this option only be used for groups of 20 or less. Webinars can be set up using Windows Meeting Space (<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-vista/features/meeting-space.aspx>) or Webex (<http://www.webex.com/>).

- **Lecture Capture Software**

The University is working to provide a solution to enable instructors to capture their lectures in classrooms equipped with Teaching Station podia, through laptops, or remotely through a computer. Lecture capture enables faculty to record the audio from their lectures along with their presentation materials. A central site will be established on which instructors can post these materials for their students. Tip sheets and training materials will be made available shortly and contact information for individuals who can provide technical and pedagogical support will be made available on the University Preparedness web site at: <http://www.preparedness.utoronto.ca/pandemic.htm>.

Instructors who wish to take advantage of this option are reminded to comply with Canadian laws in relation to the use of copyrighted materials. For more information, please see the Copyright FAQs for University of Toronto Instructors guide available at:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/ota/resources/teachingguides/CopyrightFAQs.pdf> or contact Pam Gravestock in the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation at 416-946-8585 with more specific questions.

- **Studio Recordings & Web Casting**

In some cases, instructors will be able to tape their lectures in advance of class to make available to students. This alternative may be suitable for larger classes as webcasts of these recordings will be made available through a centrally-hosted web site. A number of locations across campus will be identified for this purpose. More detailed information is forthcoming.

- **Videoconferencing**

In some cases, videoconferencing may be a viable option for the delivery of lectures/seminars. Interested faculty should contact CTSI staff to discuss needs, to determine suitability of this method of delivery, and to review available locations and technological requirements.

- **Skype**

To conduct meetings with small groups of undergraduate/graduate students or to hold office hours, instructors may wish to use Skype, a free program available at: <http://www.skype.com/>

RESOURCES

Services and Support offered through the Center for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI):

Faculty are welcome to contact CTSI for assistance with any of the following (contact information provided below):

- Blackboard account and set-up
- Pedagogical advice regarding the use of Blackboard tools
- Advice on assignment design, syllabus content and the establishment of course policies
- Advice on appropriate technological alternatives for class delivery or communication with students
- Information on relevant academic policies

Phone: 416-946-3139
416-946-5107

Email: ctsi.teaching@utoronto.ca

Web: www.teaching.utoronto.ca

Conducting Online Discussions

Conrad, R. (2004). In Donaldson J. A. (Ed.), *Engaging the online learner: Activities and resources for creative instruction* (1st ed. ed.). San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.

MacKnight, C. (2000). Teaching critical thinking through online discussions. *EDUCAUSE Quarterly*, 23(4), 38. <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EQM0048.pdf>

Palloff, R. M. (2005). In Pratt K. (Ed.), *Collaborating online : Learning together in community* (1st ed. ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.