

## **Recommendations Regarding Course Delivery in 2020-2021**

### **Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Remote Course Delivery**

**June 2, 2020**

#### **A Model for the Fall: Responsive Blended Learning**

The Committee recommends that St. Thomas faculty design their courses for full online delivery in fall 2020, incorporating the best practices to be shared by our Instructional Designer to ensure that they continue to offer students the kind of responsive, collaborative learning environment that they have come to expect at St. Thomas. Instruction should be designed around principles of accessibility for students and faculty members with disabilities, limited technology, weak Internet access, and/or scheduling challenges that might relate to care-giving duties, jobs, or time-zone differences. The Committee recommends asynchronous design as the most equitable and accessible solution, meaning course design that allows students to interact with course material, the instructor, and each other on an asynchronous basis.

We come to this recommendation based on extensive consultation with students and faculty through committee work and surveys. The survey responses received from 622 students and 82 faculty demonstrated a shared commitment to the kind of student-centred learning that is the hallmark of a STU education. Both groups described the challenges they had experienced during the sudden shift to remote learning in the spring and raised concerns about the need to provide high quality and effective remote instruction in the fall. Both students and instructors identified the need for training and support to succeed in a remote learning environment, and the importance of providing a safe on-campus environment. One key priority stressed by instructors and students alike was the need to create opportunities for individual student-instructor relationships and student interactions. Further, students have consistently prioritized the need for stability and consistency across their courses. The Committee recommends that the University maintain channels of clear communication among students, faculty, student services, and the university administration going forward. We are preparing a list of frequently asked questions and concerns that emerged from the surveys.

The Committee will work with faculty to put in place technological supports and resources to make the fall semester successful. By preparing for fully online delivery in a manner that still incorporates student interaction and close mentoring, faculty will be ready for changing public-health circumstances without major disruptions to course delivery. The goal is to achieve the highest quality course experience possible given the uncertainties of our current global situation.

At the same time, the Committee understands that individual courses may be able to operate somewhat differently. For example, some elements of synchronous design may work in cases where the faculty member and students in a single course are all able to meet online at the same time. Similarly, some faculty may be able to meet in person with small groups of students for mentoring purposes or hands-on demonstrations.

The term 'blended' in this context refers to the fact that individual faculty may be able to modify the underlying asynchronous online delivery model, whether it means interacting with students at a scheduled time online, or meeting with some students in person if their circumstances and the public health context permit. In this case, the bulk of course delivery would take place online, but students could receive mentoring from their instructor either online or in person, depending on the faculty member's circumstances. They might also be able to work together with classmates in a safe and physically distanced manner on campus, or through online chats or other social platforms. This flexibility will help us meet the diverse needs of our students while keeping both faculty and students safe.

Is this the same as a 'hybrid-flexible' model?

No, it isn't. The 'hybrid-flexible' (hy-flex) method is the most complex form of course delivery in terms of both technology and pedagogical design. It involves one instructor teaching a synchronous class to a mix of in-person students and others who participate online. In theory it sounds attractive: the instructor can continue to use their regular in-class methods and interact with remote students through a chat function. In practice, however, the format of long synchronous video lectures is far from satisfactory for remote learners, and a single instructor simply cannot manage teaching, monitoring video equipment, keeping up with the chat discussion, and engaging both sets of learners at the same time. Instead, the instructor must design and deliver two independent and parallel courses: one that benefits in-class learners and another that benefits remote learners, including those who are unable to access synchronous videos, whether because of scheduling challenges or technological limitations. Finally, the hy-flex model requires purchasing and managing large quantities of webcams and microphones that are currently unavailable because global suppliers cannot keep up with demand.