

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTINUITY

Current as of July 6, 2020

George Mason University has established the Instructional Continuity working group to identify and assess methods for academic/educational instruction and delivery in response to the decision on fall 2020 opening, and make recommendations for best practices in alignment with Mason's commitment to instruction that supports Mason's mission of "access to excellence." This group is responsible for discussing and addressing faculty concerns, including decisions about "opting out" of course modalities, and communicating critical decisions and issues to their academic units. This working group will also develop a multifaceted approach to support curriculum development, course delivery, and technology competency university-wide.

The objectives of the Instructional Continuity working group are to develop a plan and set of recommendations to support curriculum development, course delivery and technology competency across multiple instructional modalities. The plan will include information on how the academic units will identify and effectively respond to institutional learning goals across all modalities, including face-to-face, online, and hybrid. The academic unit plans will set strategies and implement methods to create high-quality learning experiences across multiple modalities.

The plans will identify necessary instructional, classroom, and technology-related accessibility requirements, and resources to meet objectives.

Policies and Procedures:

The working group will adhere to all current academic policies when possible. Where accommodations to certain academic policies need to be made, the working group will make recommendations for COVID-19 policies to be implemented for limited periods of time.

The working group will incorporate feedback on general guidelines, policy implications and financial considerations, address open items and submit individual academic plans by July 31, 2020.

The academic plans will identify how instructors can accommodate students with special vulnerabilities and those who may need to be isolated or quarantined with remote learning alternatives for in-person classes. The academic units will develop adequate plans to accommodate faculty who become sick or need to quarantine and create a contingency plan to pivot to fully online instruction with short notice.

Communication and Education:

George Mason University offers a number of resources to support curriculum development, course delivery and technology competency across multiple instructional modalities. The [Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning](#) is the university's location for promoting teaching excellence and innovation. Housing the staff from Digital Learning and Teaching Excellence, the Center is a one-stop destination for all Mason faculty and graduate students seeking to explore and test new

ideas for teaching methods and techniques including online course delivery and integrated instructional design.

The Stearns Center provides numerous course development services and training opportunities in support of online instruction.

1. **Course Development Support:** Faculty work independently on the development of their online course with consultation and guidance available from an instructional designer from Mason's partner networks. Consultation support will be provided between June 22-August 9, 2020. Consultation includes, but is not limited to: Planning course structure; transitioning lectures into compelling online sessions; designing synchronous sessions; building community; conducting quality reviews; and refining media ideas.
2. **Development Training:** The Stearns Center will host two different virtual course development primers for faculty teaching primarily online or face-to-face/hybrid in the fall.
3. **Online Course Development Primer (OCDP):** Faculty with little experience in developing online courses work in a cohort format, focusing on how to convert existing course materials into an online, predominantly asynchronous environment. Faculty participation will require 5-10 hours per week on course development.
4. **Pivotal Pedagogy Fundamentals Course (PPF):** Faculty who are preparing to teach altered face-to-face and/or hybrid courses for fall 2020—and/or faculty who want to be prepared for any necessary mid-semester “pivot” in instruction—will work in a cohort format, focusing on how to blend in-room socially-distanced teaching, synchronous video teaching, and online course activities in the most effective and engaging format.
5. **Webinars:** A variety of webinars will be provided throughout the summer and fall to support and enhance online teaching. Webinars will include facilitated Q&A. Recorded sessions will be available for those unable to attend.

Strategies for Facilitating Your Online Course: Faculty will be introduced to the tools and strategies used to facilitate learning in the online classroom. Practices such as establishing instructor presence, providing effective feedback, and monitoring asynchronous learning will be discussed, providing faculty with the confidence they need to begin facilitating their online courses.

Creating Media for Your Online Course: Faculty will learn about options for creating and leveraging media elements for learning in the online environment, including DIY video, screencasts, narrated lectures, and graphics. It will also cover best practices and resources for copyright and accessibility when incorporating media into a faculty member's course.

Managing Your Blackboard Course: Participants will learn how to leverage Blackboard tools to effectively organize their courses, communicate with students, analyze student behavior and performance, and provide rich opportunities for discussion and collaboration.

Designing Compelling Synchronous Sessions: This session focuses on remote synchronous sessions with students. Participants will learn about different ways to leverage synchronous

sessions to maximize student engagement and learning, including best practices for preparing for, facilitating, and following up on a synchronous session.

Online Teaching Strategies Course: The Online Teaching Strategies course incorporates evidence-based online practices in a facilitated, four-week session. By the end of this course, those new to the online teaching environment should feel better prepared and confident to enter the world of online teaching. Those with some experience online should come away with tips and learning strategies to improve student learning and retention. The training experience includes:

1. Overview of online learning research-based principles on how students learn;
2. Review of the community of inquiry model and its relevance to the online learning environment;
3. Strategies for establishing presence and keeping students motivated, providing effective feedback, monitoring and assessing learning, and facilitating online discussions; Suggestions for synchronous learning;
4. Management techniques to achieve work/life balance, dealing with challenging situations, and legal/ethical issues; and
5. Collaboration and group discussions with other faculty.

Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI)

To meet online and hybrid course accessibility standards, the ATI team provides faculty and students with direct assistive technology assessment, training, and support services.