

From: VPACADEMIC

Sent: March 24, 2020 11:57 AM

Subject: Planning Your Final Assessments: Updates

Dear colleagues,

I want to thank all of you for the hard work that has gone into finding solutions to the challenge of continuing student learning over the past week. For many of you there have been difficult decisions to make regarding classes and I know that some of you are still working to solve the question of final assessments.

Reports from deans and heads suggest that many instructors are planning timed exams for final assessment. **We are writing to strongly encourage you to use the least high-tech method possible, and to consider a more flexible time window for the assessment you are planning. Here's why:**

1. **Students might not be able to complete the exam in the given time slot.**
 - Timed tests risk exposing students to system slowdowns and possible shutdowns or breaks in service that will impact their ability to complete exams in timed windows. They may also cause students to lose the work already completed. We have never had such a large number of potential simultaneous users, and we cannot predict what will happen in real time.
2. **Students might not have access to fast or reliable enough wifi or technology.**
 - These circumstances are beyond their control, may impact their ability to complete timed examinations, and thus will cause significant anxiety.
3. **There is a risk to adopting new tools in challenging times.**
 - The more rigid the requirements of the test, the more likely there are to be challenges that are hard to deal with in real time, especially the first time you're using the approach.
4. **Timed online exams make academic accommodations more time-consuming for you.**
 - And no one needs that.

As you can imagine, students are likely to be very frustrated if they are unable to complete the test in the time given, or if the system or their internet access is unstable, or if they lose their work. In all those cases they would be entitled to appeal, or to sit the exam at another time. If at all possible, please consider an alternative such as the following:

- **Move to a final *assignment* rather than a final *exam*** – e.g., a take-home assignment delivered through the Blackboard Assignments tool rather than a timed final exam in the Blackboard Tests tool. Consider assessing students **ONLY** on material that has not been previously assessed.
- **Have a backup plan** using very basic technology, such as **emailing the assessment** to all students.
- **Give students a 24-hour window to complete their assessment.** The [Academic Continuity](#) team can help you set this up, or you can submit a [Service Request](#) ticket and one of the team will get back to you as soon as possible.

- **Give students the choice of taking their current grade or of completing the final assignment. Check with your dean or associate dean for guidance on the proportion of marks or learning outcomes that should have already been evaluated to consider this option.**
- **In other words, a timed test using Blackboard testing tools should be a last resort, and even then should be used with a very flexible time window.**

On a more positive and less fearful note, I am hearing stories from all across campus about how you are working in the best interests of your students, and I know that choosing testing approaches that are not perhaps as robust as you would like is a test in itself. I urge you to consider the limitations that both instructors and students are working under, and to choose an option that reduces the risk of technical problems while still allowing students to demonstrate their learning.

Time is limited, but we encourage you to discuss your test settings with an experienced colleague, the Office of Open Learning, or the Centre for Teaching and Learning if you still plan to use Blackboard Tests. The following resources and options are also available:

- [Virtual drop-in hours](#)
- [Online Resources](#)
- [Submit a ticket](#) and the team will respond as quickly as possible.

Thanks again for all your efforts to help our students succeed during this difficult time.

Sincerely,
Douglas

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