



Emergency Course Adjustments Toolkit

From pandemics to natural disasters, our university can encounter unexpected disruptions to our classes.

Included on this page are tips for how to communicate with students and remain flexible - while also keeping your own well-being in mind.

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Communicating Care

Adopt a mindset of empathy and trust.

An unexpected regional or campus disruption is a time when we need to empathize with our students, and trust that they are being honest with us about their current situation. With this empathy and trust in their expressed needs, we need to be as flexible as we can with our students. Tips below will assist with this flexibility.

Recognize technical limitations.

Remember that in the event of some disruptions, such as natural disasters, students may have no power or working internet access. Thus, it is possible they cannot respond to your communications nor reach

out to explain their current situation. Please be aware of this potential and do not penalize students who you hear from days later.

Send a note.

An easy way to show you are concerned about your student is to send an email. Acknowledge the regional devastation and ask if they are OK, as well as what they might need per the class right now.

While a group email is perfectly fine (particularly for large-enrollment classes), consider drafting an email you can copy and paste to send to each student individually (put their first name in your subject line, e.g.: "Shelly - checking in"), which can help students feel seen and cared for.

Use a form.

To collect responses from students about their current needs, consider developing a short Microsoft or Google Form.

Send a link to the form to students (in your Concern Email, e.g.). These forms can also be embedded in D2L.

Using a form helps you keep all responses in a uniform place, so you don't have to scroll through multiple email replies as you ensure each student's needs are addressed.

Deploy visuals.

Check in with students by asking them to indicate how they are doing using a [visual scale](#) or by selecting an image that represents how they feel. (You can provide some random images or ask them to find one themselves - *if* they have access to power and internet).

This is an activity you can include in a Concern Email or Needs Form (above), and/or use to begin a class meeting with once classes resume - to acknowledge the disruption and get a sense of where your students are as you begin teaching.

Avoid policing.

Communicate your respect for and trust in your students by not requiring documentation of their situation, if they are requesting your flexibility.

Policing in this way only adds to your time and task list, while adding another layer of stress and tasks for students who are going through a genuine crisis.

It is true that you may have some students take advantage of your flexibility. Perhaps the best mindset is to simply recognize that those students may also truly need your flexibility, just for other reasons.

Communications with Students

Send a quick reassurance.

Hopefully you have already reached out to students to check on their wellbeing. (If not, this is a recommended 1st step. If you know of a student who has been significantly impacted by the disaster, please [file a CARE report](#) as soon as possible!)

Your course updates may not be ready to share with students - you still may not know what they are!

In this case, at least reach out to let them know you will be adjusting the course in light of the shortened timelines, and that the changes will make success in the course achievable. Let students know you'll be posting regular updates on D2L's home page (see below).

You might *also* consider making a short video to post on your D2L site, saying the same.

Offer an optional class check-in.

Students may have questions about what's next for the course - or may just feel a bit lost in this moment.

If it's possible for you to do so, consider offering an optional Zoom for students. This is to check in with them, reassure them that changes are coming, and perhaps (if you have a sense of them) suggest what those changes might be.

If you are still making decisions, perhaps this can also be a time to ask for some student feedback about what might be most useful to keep or trim for the missed content.

Post updates.

As you are able, post quick daily updates on your D2L News page. In these updates, include where you are in the decision process for upcoming course content and assignments.

Again, if you are unsure of what those updates are, that's OK! You can even let students know that you are attending our CTE workshop to figure out your class.

The key is to not "go dark" on students who may feel uncomfortable and uncertain about what is next. Just staying in touch with them and giving updates will feel reassuring.

Try to communicate a positive outlook that suggests to students "all will be well."

Be Compassionate.

In your communications with students, take a moment to reflect on what it might be like to be in their shoes right now.

Share this insight with your students in your communications. For example, "I recognize what a confusing time this must be for you right now, wondering what is next for our classes and how our schedules are going to change." Also remember that your class is just one in their schedules, and they may feel stressed about keeping up with all the changes.

In addition, continue to acknowledge in your communications that some of your students may be facing disaster-related challenges. This is not only good support for those students (if they can access your communications), but a good reminder to other students that there is variability in how their peers can interact with the class right now.

Adapting Course Content & Assignments

Reconsider "value-added."

If you have a significant proportion of students who are faced with post-hurricane challenges, or if your class has lost significant meeting time, you may have some tough decisions to make.

Consider that it might not be best to try to force your original plans into a shortened time period - or to have students squeeze everything in on their own, once they are ready to reengage with the class.

Examine your course content and remaining assignments: Is there anything that might be beloved (by you), but may not be as necessary, if time does not permit addressing it? Cutting out a segment of content or an "icing-on-the-cake" assignment may make life easier for all involved. Let's make sure they get the cake first.

In making this decision, be sure you are not sacrificing key learning goals!

Move to slow-online completion.

If you have an assignment that is coming up soon - or was interrupted by this crisis -, consider if there are ways you might be able to break it up and have students complete it gradually, as they proceed with the remaining content as it is laid out in your course schedule.

Feathering in this disrupted chunk of work and content, using your D2L course site, may be a less-stressful way to ensure your students get the knowledge and practice they need, without sacrificing the course learning goals. (Online instructors: This same strategy can be used if needed, by creating a submodule addressing just the work/learning from this disrupted time, with new timelines.)

Recommended: Only do this for necessary content but omit if you've decided this assignment/content was "icing," not "cake."

Abbreviate assignments.

Are there ways you can keep some of your upcoming assignments, but find ways to abbreviate them for students (and your own grading)?

This may mean simply shortening the requirements. Alternatively (but admittedly more front-end work for you), you could change the assignment to a different format that is shorter for students to complete.

The key when shortening or changing the assignment is to be sure all the learning goals for that assignment are still being met - perhaps not quite as robustly as in your original plans, but at least in some regard.

Simplify grading.

If alternative grading has intrigued you but you haven't yet tried it, this could be your golden opportunity! For any current or upcoming disrupted assignments, consider assessing it using an alternative grading method, which tends to lower student stress and is often easier for you as the grader:

- **Specifications Grading:** Adjust the assignment so that the core "musts" are met in a specs table. If any are missing, students can try again with your feedback. Meeting all specs gets (in this special instance) full credit for the assignment.
- **Student-Grading:** Allow students to self-assess, perhaps on a rubric you provide, with evidence to support their evaluation. You'll be surprised how honest most students are with this process.
- **Ungrading:** Do not grade the assignment (but provide feedback!). Perhaps in this special instance (and depending on the weight of the assignment or assessment), let students know that conscientiously completing the assignment not only boosts their learning, but may make the difference in a +/- for their final course grade.
- **Proportionately Fair Failure:** At the very least, for students who are unable to complete an assignment, consider assigning scores of no lower than 50/100 for absent or below-standards work. This keeps failure recoverable and weights it at the same 10% that the other letter grades get on a 100-point scale (as opposed to the 60% weight an F typically carries in a 0-100 scale).

Deadline Flexibility

After gauging your students' needs, examine your current and upcoming course assignments and assessments.

For content that builds upon itself, having flexible deadlines can be trickier. If, to meet learning goals, you cannot go beyond a week or so of extension time, be sure to communicate why with your students. (And be prepared to deal with special cases where greater flexibility is still needed.)

Some tips to assist with deadline flexibility:

Automatically reset deadlines.

Depending on the emergency and its extent, automatically reset deadlines for the next few weeks back by approximately 1-2 weeks (perhaps longer out, if the emergency or disruptions remain unresolved).

Include grace periods.

For each adjusted deadline, include a grace period after the deadline (e.g, an extra 1-2 days), when late work will continue to be accepted without penalty.

While this may sound like the "actual due date" (and it is), framing it as the grace period encourages most students to aim for the announced deadline. However, those needing an extra day or so can get it without stress.

For remaining deadlines, permit students to request extensions.

As a part of their request for an extension, have students tell you when the new deadline should be. You can set some parameters on this, such as *up to 2 weeks past the new deadline*.

Consider using a Microsoft/Google Form for students to make this request, which helps you keep everything in one place. (Under Settings for the form, check the box that notifies you when a form has been submitted.)

Having students go through a request process can eliminate many capricious requests.

Limit extension request opportunities.

With exceptions for particularly hard-hit students, who may need some individualized plans, consider offering all other students a limited number of opportunities (e.g., 2) for extension requests for the remainder of the semester. This helps cap the number of late-incoming assignments you have to keep up with.

Check in with students.

Every few weeks, check in with your students to see if your deadline adjustments are working or if they have further suggestions. You do not have to take their suggestions - but sometimes they have good ones! If you cannot adjust to their requests, be transparent and clear about why.

Learning Flexibility

It is possible students may work to meet the updated deadlines but are doing so in a stressed and distracted state. Ergo,...not their best learning.

Our CTE always advocates for providing students opportunities to learn from their mistakes and get second chances on their work. If these opportunities are not yet built into your course, consider adding them this semester.

There are multiple ways to streamline revisions for your time:

Include automatic reattempts in D2L quizzes or exams.

Multiple attempts for quizzes works best if you have question pools focused on each key concept, so students are tested on the concepts each time, but don't get a duplicate test. Either set an upper limit of attempts or set up a Form for students to request a reattempt (with their plans about what they will do to relearn the content first!).

Including a set of study strategies that students reference in a reattempt request can be a useful support for them. See [The Learning Scientists](#) for the top 6 students should know!

Don't have pools of questions yet? Let artificial intelligence come to your rescue: Copy in course content and ask AI for 10 multiple-choice questions. Be forewarned that many will be poor - but are adaptable for use with some tweaking. Remember that you can continue to refine your request of AI and ask for additional questions.

Set up a Request for Revision form.

Students not only make this request but also demonstrate through form responses that they have read their feedback and explain what they will improve on the revision.

Require marked changes.

For written or other visual work, require that updates are marked (such as using a font of another color) or are described in a cover page. This saves a lot of re-grading time.

If students don't mark their changes, request that they do so before their work will be re-assessed.

Limit reattempts.

In the same way that you might limit extension requests from students, you can also limit reattempts with a cap. This helps ensure students try their best on a first attempt but gives them some space for failure.

Track extension requests and reattempts.

Tracking is easily done in one-two D2L gradebook items. Create a grade item that is Text-Only. This will work a bit like a very simple checkbook account.

To start, enter for all students, as a text entry, the # of requests or reattempts you are allowing (e.g., 2). As they make requests, deduct that from their starting total. In the Notes for that student's grade item, make a quick note of which assignment a request is being used for.

Pruning Back Your Course

Pruning Course Content & Assignments: Basic Steps

The key to making decisions in this moment is to revisit the process we should all undertake when we design our courses. Only now, we have to use a red pen and a draconian attitude.

Content

1. **Make a list of the learning goals.** Sit down and list out all of the learning goals that remain from the disrupted part of this semester onward.
2. **Include the reasons.** For each learning goal, write out a brief explanation as to why it is included.
3. **Eliminate goals with weak reasons.** If a reason is, "the textbook covers it" or "I've always included it," but there are not stronger reasons to keep a learning goal, cross it out. (Stronger reasons are "essential to core disciplinary understanding," or "necessary to succeed in subsequent courses.")
4. **Remove that content from your plans.**

5. **Adjust your course schedule accordingly.**

Assignments and Assessments (A&A)

1. **Map A&As to your learning goals.** Next to each learning goal, include the method by which you planned to help students learn toward that goal as well as how you planned to assess that learning.
2. **Adapt or eliminate A&As for stricken goals & content.** If an A/A addresses multiple content points, only some of which is stricken from the course, adapt it to eliminate the removed content. This should shorten the A/A. If an A/A is entirely focused on removed content, eliminate that A/A from course requirements.
3. **Adjust your course schedule accordingly.**

Pruning Course Content & Assignments: Leverage AI

There are several ways you can use AI to assist you and your students in this moment. Below are ways to use it as you make decisions about pruning content.

The tips below use an AI engine such as **ChatGPT** or **CoPilot**.

- **Mentorship:** Describe to AI your course content and learning goals. Then explain our circumstances and the goals that remain. Ask AI which learning goals for the discipline are most necessary to retain and which could be trimmed (with an explanation). AI's responses could spark some thoughts and considerations for you.
- **"Expert" advice:** Give AI a "role" as an expert in your field. Explain the level of the course in its progression from novice to developed learner. Ask, more broadly, for AI to identify the most important learning goals students should meet in a course such as this one.
- **Teaching suggestions:** After describing to AI the situation and your need to quickly pivot, ask for ideas on how to teach your adapted content (once the unnecessary content has been trimmed).
- **Assignment adaptations:** Explain to AI an assignment that you need to shorten or adapt in some other way. Ask for suggestions.

For these uses and all others, we rarely get responses from AI that are useful at first pass. However, with your expert lens, you can either refine your prompts to AI or use an AI suggestion as a springboard to a better idea that you can build with that starting point.

Moving Course Content to the Slow Lane

Moving Course Content Online: Basic Steps

Some or all of the disrupted content in your course may be essential content.

In this instance, it's time to either (a) push your entire schedule back and eliminate/slow-track later content, or (b) move this disrupted content online to be slow-tracked.

Which you do depends on the content and your expert judgment.

Here are some ideas and tips for any content you slow-track to online:

- **Create a module** specifically for this slow-tracked content and mark it clearly. House all other materials and activities, below, within this module.
- For direct content delivery, **create a series of short videos** to post online. Avoid one long lecture. Segment by topic, and it's best to be unscripted and to use visuals (slides with images more than words).
- Locate other, **professionally developed videos** online that you can link in for students to watch.
- You can help students "walk through" these videos by including them, sequentially, in one or more D2L "quizzes." For example, post Video 1, then ask some follow-up questions in the quiz. Then comes Video 2, etc. Keep these quizzes short, to allow students to do them a little at a time, as they work this learning into their remaining schedules.
- **Keep any written content on D2L short & digestible. Find ways to include white space and, when possible or appropriate, images.**
- Offer **opportunities for students to practice** learning the content:
- Adapt a [Project Zero Thinking Routine](#) to an interactive and embeddable format for D2L, such as in a Padlet or Google Document.
- Create **practice quiz questions** (better yet: ask students to submit some!) into pools of questions addressing content topics. Create short, repeatable quizzes for students to test their own learning.

Remember that **students will need additional time** to complete anything moved to the online setting. (And again remember that they may be doing this for several classes.) Consider making this new module something to be completed "by the last week of classes" to permit this time.

Also remember that **students less affected by the disaster will have the advantage** of accessing and using this online information sooner or more often. Recognizing this disparity may mean needing to adjust requirements or expectations for affected students.

Moving Course Content Online: Leverage AI

- **Editor:** You can upload articles or longer content into [Google Notebook LM](#), and then request an FAQ summary or study guide. You can also ask it to generate a podcast discussing the article!

Any of these could be used to shorten reading requirements for students while still providing them the key information online. *(Thank you to Dr. Karin Keith for sharing with CTE!)*

- **"Expert" interaction:** You can create a free-version (for Teachers) account in schoolai.com and either locate or create an "expert" chatbot. Once created, you can share this with your students by embedding it in D2L. *(Thank you to Dr. Trevor Chapman for sharing with CTE!)*
- **Key idea discussions:** Also in schoolai.com, you can create a Chatbot discussion centered around key ideas you would like your students to discuss and explore. This gives them real-time conversation around topics, even in an asynchronous setting.

There are most certainly more ways to use AI out there, but these are the quickest we can advise and should not take long to figure out and use.

To embed Padlets, Google Docs, MS Forms, and schoolai into D2L Content:

- Click to "Add New"
- Select "Add a Link"
- Insert the shareable link/URL for created page/app to embed
- UNclick "external resource/open in new window"

Be sure to test it out first and include actual link in the Description in case students encounter trouble with the embedded version!

Remember: Our goal is student learning!

We are instituting these methods to help our students continue to learn during trying times.

Please reach out with your questions! We can help you troubleshoot.



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