

Transitioning to Online Class Meetings

College of Idaho

March, 2020

Overview: The spread of COVID-19 may require that the College of Idaho issue an order to cease in-person class meetings on short notice this semester. If this happens, faculty members will be asked to transition to online meetings in order to complete the term. Such a transition is likely to involve many questions and no small amount of confusion as both instructors and students move from familiar processes to a completely different method of teaching and learning. This document represents our collective effort to plan ahead and manage the transition as effectively as possible.

Online teaching and learning can be done in a wide variety of manners and methods. Our purpose in this situation is to maximize simplicity and efficiency. Accordingly, we request that faculty follow these guidelines closely to achieve consistency of processes and messaging for students. Utilizing multiple platforms (e.g., Zoom, GoToMeeting, Skype, etc.) and approaches would be likely to increase confusion and present more complex challenges to our IT unit than otherwise might be the case.

Here are some primary considerations related to the transition:

Synchronicity: Online courses at large tend to occur in real time, that is, synchronously, so that everyone meets at the same period, or on demand, so that students access course content more or less when they wish to do so and not at the same time except by coincidence. For our purposes in response to the current exigencies, classes should be held “live” rather than proctored in an asynchronous manner. This means that instructors should plan to meet with their students during the same times and days as originally scheduled, but in an online medium. Office hours may be adjusted, but should be sustained so that students know when instructors will be available online for online chat or video communication, or teleconferencing or other forms of engagement.

Technology: Two platforms already in use at the College will be utilized for this transition to online instruction: **Canvas**, the College Learning Management System (LMS), will continue to serve as the primary site for syllabi, schedules, curriculum, announcements, grade book functions, and course content. **Teams** is the Microsoft 365 unified communication and collaboration platform designed to support chat and video meetings. Creating classes in Teams and utilizing these functions is a simple and straightforward process. (Teams also has much of the functionality of Canvas, but shifting most or all functions to that platform is not warranted). Our IT Office will be issuing instructions about how to access and utilize these functions for those new to the interface shortly.

Course Adjustments: Moving to a digital class meeting structure will involve more than technology. It will likely require adjustments to the manner in which you proctor your curriculum. For example, group discussion, while still possible online, will likely be quite different than face-to-face contexts. Other activity-oriented sessions, such as labs, may be impossible to reproduce in an online context. Examinations designed to be taken in a controlled group setting may require transition to a take-home structure due to the inability of instructors to carefully monitor students as they answer questions. For each aspect of your curriculum, consider carefully what function or outcome you seek and how that outcome might be achieved in an online medium.

Communication: The known and unknown aspects of this situation—risk factors, rate of spread, concerns for family, implications for grades, and more—have increased stress and anxiety levels among students, to say nothing of faculty colleagues and staff. You may help to alleviate some measure of this increase through effective communication. Consider how you might maintain contact with your administrative assistant, whether by phone, email, or an online chat function. Similarly, review your plans for course adjustment as they emerge with your students sooner and later, adding details as you are able. Start with planning for communication itself; provide updates at the beginning of each successive in-person session, and indicate your primary mode of group communication if the courses go online (e.g., announcements via Canvas, etc.).

Pilot the Changes: Recognizing that we will not be able to anticipate all the challenges and complications involved with moving to online class meetings, wisdom dictates that we should test the process, learn what we may about the unexpected, and adjust as can be done prior to moving online all at once. We have lent careful consideration to a campus-wide pilot session (e.g., all classes Tuesday and Wednesday of next week will be online as a trial run); however, we recognize that your curriculum and schedule might be a poor fit for any such mandate. Accordingly, **we request that all faculty members select one session next week, March 16-20, to go online in each course they teach**. We will provide a means for you to communicate feedback regarding successes, challenges, and lessons learned. This information will be shared with the faculty at large, IT, and other relevant offices.