March 17, 2020

Instructional Continuity: Stearns Center and ITS Support

The Stearns Center and Information Technology Services are working diligently to provide services to faculty across the university as Mason expands further into virtual instruction. Guidance, best practices, and helpful resources are available on the Stearns Center’s Instructional Continuity page and on ITS’ Blackboard Knowledge Base page to help support this transition.

Here are a few recommendations and resources we’ve complied to help you prepare.

Get started with the basics. We recommend that faculty work in stages rather than trying to create a full course transformation all at once.

- **Begin with baseline learning support:** Your goal is not to replicate your current face-to-face class, or to create a fully developed online class, but to use online tools to adapt so that you can support learners through virtual connections this semester. Consider creating content in one-week blocks to give both you and your students specific content to focus on, particularly if you are newer to these tools.

- **Use Blackboard and its tools:** To provide the most consistent experience for all of our students through this transition, we advise all faculty to create a course base using their assigned Blackboard course shell. Wherever possible, focus on using basic Blackboard tools that our staff can support.

- **Attend one of our webinars:** The Stearns Center and Blackboard Support encourage all faculty to attend one of our upcoming webinars covering the essentials for getting started. See the full schedule on the IT Knowledge Base page; note that webinars are being recorded and will be linked under each session if you would like to view one of the recordings instead. On-demand resources are also available for Blackboard, Kaltura, Collaborate Ultra, and Linkedin Learning.

Try our sample Blackboard template. We encourage you to explore our sample Blackboard template. You can find a full set of directions for uploading this template to your own Blackboard site by checking our Instructional Continuity site under View a Sample Basic Blackboard Site with Resources and/or Upload a Basic Blackboard Course Template. The template has a lot of preloaded instructional guidance and is organized by weeks to support blocks of content.

**Contact us during office hours.** We’re providing virtual office hours with instructional designers, Stearns Center staff, and the Blackboard Support Team for assistance with using the
tools and transitioning activities to an online format. You can access our office hour information in the [Blackboard knowledge base](https://blackboard.gmu.edu).

**Request additional support for course design.** As an additional level of support, we have assigned instructional designers to each school and college to help support a longer-term shift to remote teaching for the semester. Instructional designers are available to help schools and faculty implement online tools using best practices, identify alternative assessment ideas, address specific instructional challenges, and - most importantly - make recommendations for learning experiences that meet course needs. If you would like a consultation, please complete our [intake form](https://blackboard.gmu.edu).

**Request support with exams.** In addition to assessment tools available through Blackboard, faculty also have access to a suite of assessment tools powered by Respondus.

- **Respondus 4.0** - is a tool for creating and managing exams that can be printed to paper or published directly to Blackboard.
- **Respondus LockDown Browser** - is a custom browser that locks down the testing environment within the Blackboard environment. It locks down student browsers and prohibits them from accessing the internet while taking an exam.
- **Respondus Monitor** – is a compliment to LockDown Browser and uses a student’s webcam and video analytics to prevent cheating during non-proctored exams. Faculty can review video of behavior the system has flagged as suspicious.

If you would like assistance converting your paper-based exam into Respondus, please complete our [Exam Conversion form and upload your exam](https://blackboard.gmu.edu).

We recognize that these are extraordinary times, and we thank you for all that you are doing to support Mason students and your colleagues as we adapt to new learning environments this semester. If you have suggestions for how we can improve our resources for faculty, please send them to [stearns@gmu.edu](mailto:stearns@gmu.edu).

The Stearns Center and Blackboard Support Teams