

**Remote Teaching and Learning Online Preparedness Task Force**  
**Weekly update #5**  
**June 25, 2020**

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Colleagues,

Last week marked an important milestone in our planning for the 2020-21 academic year with the announcement that StFX campus will open to students and that most of our classes will take place face-to-face. The work of the Online Preparedness Task Force continues, though with a bit of a shift. While we continue to prepare the necessary resources and supports for the estimated 25% of courses that will take place online, we also thinking about how to best support faculty and students who are teaching and learning in both environments.

### **Recommendations**

The Online Preparedness Task Force approved the following recommendations at its meeting on June 18<sup>th</sup>. The full text of each can be accessed on our [website](#).

- *Define specialized software request, intake, and approval methods* -- This recommendation describes the process that departments should use to get approval for any specialized software needed to deliver courses online. This document is particularly important for departments offering specialized courses such as studios or labs that might need unique software. The key recommendation is that departments reach out to IT to have them assess a software choice for security and privacy concerns prior to requesting funds from a Dean.
- *Emergency funding for student technology needs* -- This recommendation supports additional funding for the Student Emergency Relief Fund so that students can apply for needs-based funding to help with the costs of technology needed for online courses.
- *Student orientation to online learning be delivered through X Starts Here and X Continues Here* – This recommendation outlines the process for orienting students to learning online prior to arrival. The recommendation also suggests content, including introduction to Collaborate and issues related to academic integrity.

### **Student - Student mentoring**

Recognizing that first-year students will have an unusual transition to university, the Task Force is recommending that departments, programs, student academic societies, and other relevant groups create opportunities for mentoring-type relationships between first-year students and upper year students in their programs. For students in direct-entry programs (e.g. HKIN, BBA, NURS), the relationships can be facilitated before courses begin. For students who declare a major later in their program, departments may be able to encourage academic societies to create events and opportunities that are specifically attentive to the needs of first-year students. The full rationale is available [here](#).

### **Text Book Ordering**

The Faculty Readiness Working Group considered the potential challenges of accessing text books for students who are studying online. The group prepared a set of considerations for faculty and teaching staff as they select and order textbooks. The information has been shared on the faculty listserv, but it can also be accessed [here](#).

## Designing a face-to face course for easier transition to online

Instructors who will be teaching face-to-face have asked for suggestions about how best to set up courses so that they could be quickly transitioned online in the unlikely event it becomes necessary later in the year. Staff in IT Services and CDE suggest the following:

- **Continue to learn about the online tools and software** and consider how you might use them. While it is not necessary to design both an online and face-to-face syllabus for each course, it does make sense to use the available PD to consider the approach you will take if an unexpected switch to remote teaching becomes necessary.
- **Use your Moodle page from the beginning of term.** Faculty and teaching staff should be comfortable using Moodle as the default way to share files with students and receive assignments from them. All course documents should be available on Moodle, and students should be encouraged to access the Moodle site regularly.
- **Test Collaborate with your class.** Face-to-face classes can have a Collaborate classroom accessible through the course Moodle page. Having easy access to Collaborate means that people teaching face-to-face could use Collaborate at any time; for example, Collaborate can become a space to meet with students informally while maintaining physical distance. We will communicate with instructors about how to access Collaborate in face-to face classes as the details are finalized.

## Professional Development Plan

The Faculty Readiness Working Group created an overview of all the different types of PD activities available to faculty members in the next few months. This [graphic](#) will help you keep track of all the opportunities.

## Upcoming professional development

Now that the university has announced a planned return to campus for faculty and students, many instructors are thinking about how to adapt their F2F teaching to maintain physical distance. This is particularly relevant for people who do a lot of small group discussions in their classes. The Faculty Development Committee and the Teaching and Learning Centre will be creating opportunities for idea exchange on this topic, including hosting a Virtual Coffee Break Discussion on Friday, July 3. Contact [Angie Kolen](#) for details.

The online teaching Professional Development sessions are ongoing, with both technology and pedagogy focused sessions scheduled through to the end of June. The full list is available on our [website](#) and links to recordings of all sessions are also available.

## Exchanging ideas with colleagues using Yammer

CDE staff have created an online group where faculty and teaching staff can have ongoing informal conversations on topics related to online teaching. The discussion is taking place using Yammer, one of the apps available in Office 365. Yammer works like a closed Facebook group, where you can chat, pose questions, exchange ideas, and share links. Staff at IT and CDE will regularly review chat logs and provide answers to your questions. To access the group, go to: [bit.ly/online-teaching-yammer-group](https://bit.ly/online-teaching-yammer-group). You will first have to request to join; once you are in, you will be able to scroll through the discussions or post your own questions and responses.

Continued thanks to everyone for their dedicated efforts. We have learned so much from each other as the past few weeks have unfolded. If you have additional questions or suggestions, please don't hesitate to reach out.

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