

## **Remote Teaching and Learning Preparedness Task Force Update #1 - May 19, 2020**

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We are pleased to provide the campus community with an update on the work of the Remote Teaching and Learning (Online) Task Force. This group has been asked to provide recommendations on how best to deliver a high-quality teaching and learning experience for our students in the event that we have to temporarily deliver our academic programs and services online during 2020-21.

The Task Force, which is composed of 26 faculty, student, and staff representatives from across campus, began meeting on May 7, and has met regularly to discuss and frame our approach. The broader Task Force has now formed into five working groups each with a specific set of responsibilities: faculty readiness and support; student readiness for online learning; ongoing student academic support; academic integrity and assessment; and technology. We will provide more details on this work in our next update.

### **Guiding Principles**

The Task Force has adopted a set of eight principles to guide the university effort toward online delivery. These principles emphasize our commitment to maintaining academic quality and to providing an engaging learning experience for our students. That commitment to quality is framed within a recognition that this temporary move to online learning presents significant challenges and that faculty, students, and staff must be supported throughout the process. The complete [Guiding Principles](#) has been posted to the website of the Teaching and Learning Centre.

### **First Recommendation: Bb Collaborate as the primary learning platform**

The Task Force recognizes the benefits of encouraging a single learning platform to deliver most online classes. While there may be unique situations where other learning platforms are needed, adopting a single, primary platform will allow us to concentrate efforts and resources, while helping create a more unified learning experience for our students. With this in mind, the Task Force has recommended Blackboard Collaborate as the primary learning platform. Collaborate will be used alongside Moodle, our learning management system.

Collaborate was designed specifically for educational use and offers a number of tools that replicate the face-to-face classroom experience that are not available in platforms designed for business environments (e.g., Microsoft Teams or Zoom). For example, Collaborate allows breakout groups, whiteboards, polling, and offers multiple ways to assess student responses in real time. Collaborate also integrates seamlessly with Moodle, allowing students to access the virtual classroom directly through the course Moodle page, thus eliminating the need to share links. For more information about Collaborate's extensive functionality, see the attached document.

### **Professional Development Sessions**

The Task Force is developing an extensive faculty development plan that will involve workshops, resources, and peer-to-peer mentorship. As a first step, the Task Force, in cooperation with faculty members in the Faculty of Education and the Teaching and Learning Centre, has been offering a professional development session to introduce a Collaborate classroom. To date, over 190 faculty and staff have attended “A glimpse into an online classroom using synchronous tools.” A second session on asynchronous activities in an online environment will take place starting next **Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup> from 2:30-4:00 pm**. Signup will be sent through email.

### **Collaborate Demonstration Room**

Continuing and Distance Education has set up a Demonstration Moodle Page ([bit.ly/demo-remote-moodle-page](http://bit.ly/demo-remote-moodle-page)) with access to a demo Collaborate Online Classroom. Faculty and teaching staff are invited to log in and practice with the tools.

When you sign in, there may be other folks in the room, so you can chat and share the space and practice with whatever tools you like. You may also like to ask a colleague or two to sign in at the same time so you can test the features together. You will also notice a number of short tutorials and video that give you more instruction on many of the features. We urge you to ‘go play’ and become familiar with some of the basic tools in Collaborate. If you have any issues accessing the page, please email [cdesupport@stfx.ca](mailto:cdesupport@stfx.ca).

### **Survey**

In the next day or so, you will receive an email survey allowing you to specify the kinds of technology and instructional support you will need in order to best deliver your courses remotely and serve our students in an online environment. The findings from this brief survey will help the Task Force better plan its work, so we encourage you to participate.

### **Connecting campus efforts**

While the Task Force is concentrating on issues related to remote teaching and learning that span departments and Faculties, we are also encouraging and supporting preparations that are taking place within individual departments and units. We encourage folks that have questions related to Task Force work to bring them forward to the Task Force Co-Chairs so we can help form connections with the Working Groups and coordinate efforts.

### **Keeping you informed**

Given the tight time frame, the Task Force will not be waiting to return a single report to the campus community. Rather we will communicate regularly through emails to notify you of recommendations as they are made and to keep everyone apprised of the Task Force progress. In addition to regular email updates, we are working together with the [Teaching and Learning Centre](#) to use their website as the hub for all resources and information regarding preparing for online learning. This site is currently under construction; new information is being posted regularly.

### **In closing**

The potential move to online delivery presents unprecedented challenges; however, we are witnessing tremendous efforts being made in a spirit of cooperation and with the interests of our students at the heart of our efforts. We thank everyone for their commitment to this task.

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Task Force Co-Chairs