

## Alternatives for Remote Learning

Present circumstances have made it necessary to transition from our familiar teaching methods to online education. However, not all of our students possess the technologies necessary for success in a fully digital classroom. How can we support the instructional needs of all learners when we are unable to meet on campus?

Correspondence Courses existed long before the internet. Students and instructors in correspondence courses usually communicate via U.S. mail.

- The institution ships the student a package of instructional materials that the student completes at their own pace, returning their assignments and exams via U.S. Mail.
- Correspondence courses usually involve minimal interaction between students and instructors due to the time delays involved in relying on U.S. mail. Due to the delays in this form of communication, correspondence courses do not provide regular and substantive interactions between students and faculty. Therefore, the U.S. Department of Education considers correspondence courses ineligible for financial aid.<sup>1</sup>

Telecourses deliver instructional content to students off campus and remain a staple of higher education, including online learning today.

- Telecourses originally relied on closed circuit television broadcasts, which students viewed at home or from a secondary meeting place. For instance, an institution might broadcast an on-campus course to a group of students taking the same course at a secondary location.
- Institutions sometimes have their own cable television channel for broadcasting telecourses, as well.
- Alternatively, the institution might ship pre-recorded lectures to students, who view these on VCR, DVD, or other electronic media.
- Students in telecourses read the same textbooks, work with the same printed materials, and complete the same assignments as in an on-campus course. This may require the instructor to ship items to students using U.S. Mail or another delivery provider and for the students to submit completed work via the same means.
- Telecourses today include online education and include expanded technologies connecting students and instructors in real time.

We can borrow a few strategies from correspondence courses and telecourses that can help us through our unexpected transition to distance learning.

- Ship physical materials to students via U.S. mail if they cannot access or work with online files. Likewise, students could then send their completed work to the instructor through U.S. Mail. Instructors should build some leniency into due dates to accommodate the delays involved in using “snail mail,” or they might reduce the number of assignments students are required to complete.

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<sup>1</sup> Poulin, R. (2012). Is your distance education course actually a correspondence course? WCET Frontiers. <https://wcetfrontiers.org/2012/04/20/correspondence-definition/>

- Although not all of our students have internet access, nearly all of them have a telephone and can work online through their cellular data plans. FaceTime, Skype, Google Hangouts, Go To Meeting, or WhatsApp can facilitate our communications.
  - Students can call, text, or FaceTime the instructor when they have questions. Instructors can use the same technologies to share information with students, provide feedback on their work, remind them of due dates, and so on.
  - Students can watch and listen to a live broadcast of a lecture or participate in a real time conversation using their phones. In fact, Zoom, even provides instructions on how to join a live meeting using a traditional telephone.<sup>2</sup>
  - Flipgrid is a free app that students and instructors can use on either computers or smartphones to create short videos and presentations, and to reflect upon and share student learning.<sup>3</sup>

As we consider how to teach during the time we cannot be on campus, we have to remember that our students will not all be able to access our instruction in the same way. Therefore, we must make a concerted effort to meet our students' individual needs.

- Ask students to tell you if they are unable to use the online classroom as instructed.
- Allow students to submit their assignments in alternative formats. For example, if you want students to write a paper, they could submit it online, or they could:
  - Mail a physical copy of their paper to you. Call, text, or email the student upon receipt to provide timely feedback.
  - Take a photo of their work or use a free scanner app and send the image to you via email or text message.
- Provide instructions for connecting by phone or via an app to any live real-time lectures or meetings you plan to hold.

This is a challenging time for all of us. Be patient with students and respectful of their struggles. Be honest with students about your own difficulties in adapting to online learning environments on such short notice. Communicating a message of, "This is hard for all of us, but we're all in this together and we can help and support one another no matter what it takes," will go a long way towards easing students' anxieties. When you or your students run into problems, or when they ask you questions you can't answer, it's okay to say, "I don't know, but let's figure it out together."

We also need to grant extra leniency for our students who lack adequate resources for online learning. If this means we need to revert to older technologies, adjust due dates, modify assignments, or make other changes to our teaching practice to support their learning, that's simply what we must do. Remember: fairness is not equality. We should not strive to treat everyone the same, but to meet everyone's needs to the best of our abilities. Our goal should never be to make students complete assignments or other tasks. Rather, our purpose is to facilitate every student's learning, even if this means making changes for one student that do not apply to all.

None of us has all of the answers to the challenges we face right now, but we can most certainly work together to find solutions.

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<sup>2</sup> Zoom Help Center. (n.d.). Joining a meeting by phone. <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362663-Joining-a-meeting-by-phone>

<sup>3</sup> Information. Flipgrid. <https://info.flipgrid.com/>