



March 11, 2020

Dear Faculty, Instructors and Staff,

We understand many of you have questions about Montana State University moving to online course delivery in light of the continuing spread of COVID-19. This message provides guidance on steps we are asking you to take in preparation for converting all in-person teaching to an online modality for remote delivery of instruction.

We ask you to make these preparations in accordance with the university's main objective of keeping you and our campus community safe.

We anticipate that your next question will be: What will be the triggering criteria for the university to go fully or partially online?

We continue to follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Montana Department of Health, the Gallatin City-County Health Department and direction from the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education. To date, the CDC has only issued "[Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Institutions of Higher Education.](#)" This guidance can best be described as "make preparations."

As of today, no Montana University System campus has received authority to cancel in-person classes. However, faculty at MSU are encouraged to prepare for that eventuality and begin transitioning their courses online as soon as they are ready.

As you prepare to move to online delivery, please ask yourself these questions:

1. Can you teach your current in-person, face-to-face courses remotely?
2. If so, what strategy will you utilize; i.e., [Brightspace](#), [Webex](#), video presentations, [TechSmith Relay](#), or a combination of technology teaching tools.
3. How will you conduct and coordinate assessments, exams and assignments?
4. How will you facilitate group discussions and interactive learning?

A task force led by Provost Mokwa has developed a web-based resource –which is live now– called [MSU Learn Anywhere](#), to assist you with course organization and technology tools for use in teaching undergraduate and graduate courses under several potential scenarios:

1. The course instructor must teach from a distance.
2. One or more students must engage from a distance.
3. In-person classroom instruction is suspended for a period of time.
4. Health officials advise faculty and students to practice "social distancing."

In all of these scenarios, faculty will need to invoke alternative distance-based instructional methods. In some circumstances, faculty may also need to adjust course content, while maintaining and achieving key learning outcomes.

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**Mountains & Minds**

We recognize that we are asking you midway through the semester to prepare for re-tooling and even re-thinking how you teach. We make these preparations because we know that you want to avoid putting your students, and yourselves, at risk. Please devote time over the next 24 hours to review the teaching and learning resources available to assist you at [MSU Learn Anywhere](#) and do not hesitate to seek help with any aspect of your teaching. You will see these pages offer practical, implementable advice for selecting and using alternative instructional methods for remote course delivery.

Under these circumstances, the Department of Education and our regional accreditor, NWCCU have provided universities permission to change teaching modalities within individual courses, without going through a formal review and approval process. Put another way; MSU has approval from our oversight agencies to re-imagine your expectations for students with alternative, equivalent assignments in the event it becomes necessary to modify your mode of course delivery from in-person to hybrid or to fully online.

Plan to use the two days, March 26-27, that were previously reserved for the NCUR event to participate in training and to experiment –pilot– online instruction of your classes. **Faculty who desire to move their courses fully online for the remainder of this semester may proceed now.** It is vitally important that changes of course delivery method are clearly communicated to students and that students understand the changes and expectations.

When conducting a rapid shift from face-to-face or in-person learning to online learning, be sure to communicate to students clearly and frequently; indicate all of the changes that will take place, including any modifications to expectations, grading, course schedule, due dates, assignments and formats or methods of conducting quizzes/exams, discussions and assignments. You will find it most effective during any transition to communicate this information in multiple places including email, course announcements and Brightspace/D2L (using the course changes section in the course shell that students see when they log into the course). More information on best practices can be found [here](#).

In summary, we ask you to please start active preparation for transitioning to online course delivery. We have resources and people at MSU ready to assist you with the offering of lectures and discussions on-line, either synchronously within the scheduled class period, or asynchronously. Faculty are asked to be as flexible as possible in providing students the opportunity to demonstrate their accomplishment of learning outcomes through take-home examinations, on-line testing or other appropriate means. Most importantly, as changes are implemented, be pro-active with frequent communications to your students to ensure they understand their options and revised expectations.

By working together and taking advantage of university teaching resources, support and a variety of training opportunities, I am confident that we can provide students with the opportunity to complete their courses with minimal disruption while meeting the learning outcomes, competencies and knowledge requirements for each course.

With these steps, we will be ready to act when the time arrives to shift fully to remote delivery of instruction.

Sincerely,

Eric Austin  
Faculty Senate Chair

and

Bob Mokwa  
Executive Vice President and Provost  
Montana State University