McMaster University has a rich history of excellent teaching and learning across all of its Faculties and Programs, excelling in problem-based and inquiry-based learning, interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate programs, community-engaged learning and experiential education. Our faculty, instructors, and instructional staff value the interactions that we have with our students in our classrooms, studios, labs and clinical spaces. We continueto invest in these learning spaces on our campus and in our community including active-learning classrooms, art and theatre spaces, teaching labs and makerspaces.

We now find ourselves in a very different academic environment due to our efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 infections in all of our communities, locally and globally. We need to prioritize the health and well-being of every individual within our McMaster and Hamilton communities. For this reason, we are doing all we can to align with the State of Emergency protocols established by the Ontario government. In keeping with this commitment, we made a rapid switch to move all of our Winter 2020 courses to a remote teaching environment on March 17. Thank you to everyone for the creativity and energy that you have brought to this transition through your course changes and to our students who continue to be engaged, as best they can, in these remote learning spaces.

Our efforts to maintain social distancing will continue in our community and we will remain closed physically to students in the upcoming months. Nonetheless, we are still looking forward to exciting Spring and Summer sessions of teaching and learning. During spring and summer, we will continue to provide courses in remote teaching formats, but there are many different formats that these courses can take. This does not mean that the quality of our teaching will be diminished in any way. We have excellent tenured, permanent, and sessional faculty and instructors who have the ability and enthusiasm to teach in diverse and creative ways.

This is a temporary measure to allow McMaster to continue teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the brisk timelines to mount course offerings virtually, we do not expect the creation of fully integrated online courses. Those of you who have created online courses know that this is a complex and lengthy process and we are not working in ideal circumstances. Instead we will all explore creative ways to bring our in-person courses to our students using remote teaching tools to deliver engaging and comprehensive undergraduate and graduate programs.

We have many resources available through the MacPherson Institute, the Library, and University Technology Services teams. If an instructor would like support with key course design principles for virtual classroom or remote teaching, online workshops are available through the MacPherson Institute. Sessional Faculty members are encouraged to speak with their Department Chair/Director to identify any support and/or training they may require in order to make this transition successfully.
TYPES OF REMOTE TEACHING

Virtual Classroom for Spring/Summer 2020

Most Spring and Summer courses will of necessity move to virtual classroom/remote teaching. This means teaching as much as possible in the same way as an instructor would have taught in a face-face classroom, but providing video lectures, assignments, evaluations, learning resources and communications to students remotely. Instructors should be comfortable with our learning management system, Avenue to Learn, as the central space for delivery of course content, activities and assessments. In some courses, instructors may choose to deliver lectures in a synchronous format (students listening in real-time to a lecture), especially those that require in-class discussion. In this case, instructors should be comfortable with delivering content synchronously through web-conferencing available through our supported tools, including Zoom, WebEx and Microsoft Teams. We strongly encourage instructors to record these lectures and make the recordings available for students for both accessibility and flexibility. In other courses, instructors may choose to pre-record lectures using our supported tools such as Echo360 or MacVideo so that they can be viewed by students in an asynchronous format (students view pre-recorded lectures at any time). Also note that in both cases, video lectures must be closed captioned. The tools above can be configured to have this to happen automatically. For recorded lectures, closed captioning can be reviewed and edited prior to release. Regardless of the format used, the MacPherson Institute and McMaster Continuing Education will continue to share best practices for teaching preparation.

In addition to the online resources and guidelines available on the Instructional Continuity webpage, MacPherson Institute staff are working with academic and central partners to provide orientations to the various technology tools and guidance on accessibility considerations for virtual classrooms. The Instructional Continuity webpage will also be expanded upon to include specific guidance and resources for the Spring/Summer term.

For the Virtual Classroom, we do not anticipate any additional teaching costs.

Supplementing the Virtual Classroom with Digital Learning Tools

The basic virtual classroom might not work for all courses, or instructors might be eager to use this as an opportunity to revise their course by introducing additional online learning materials, new pedagogies and digital learning tools. Some courses may have additional requirements for creating new online tools often associated with hands-on learning, labs or studios in order to enhance the virtual classroom experiences. MacPherson staff are available and can offer pedagogical advice on the best ways to reconsider a 50-minute lecture into shorter recorded segments or modules interspersed with interactive online elements that engage students in learning. The flexibility of the asynchronous classes allows students to access the lectures/modules around their schedules, in different time-zones, on a lower-bandwidth basis and in alignment with their accessibility needs. MacPherson staff can also advise and support instructors in creating some necessary new learning tools, but they are limited in their capacity to co-create or build new learning resources for spring/summer courses. Depending on the scope of the need, they may be able to make connections to people/contractors that are good and could help with building the resources needed.

Online courses

McMaster has many fully online courses that have already been developed and will be offered in the Spring and Summer terms. Fully online courses have been designed for an online environment, scripted, pre-recorded and may have many different embedded digital elements including videos and embedded
quizzing. There may be interest in creating new online courses for this term, in anticipation of using them in future years. Pre-recording of lecture modules can occur using supported tools such as Echo360 or MacVideo, but there are other platforms used as well. Recorded lectures must be closed captioned. The tools above can be configured to have this to happen automatically. For recorded lectures, closed captioning can be reviewed and edited prior to release.

We caution that that there is a short timeline for creating a fully online course, but we also recognize that some departments may have long-term needs precipitated by the COVID-19 contingency planning that we are in now. As above, MacPherson staff are available to advise and guide instructors in creating an online course, but currently there are no permanent staff dedicated to online course creation.

TEXTBOOKS AND DIGITAL RESOURCES
The Campus Store is committed to student success and has been actively reaching out to faculty members and/or instructors to offer assistance in identifying digital resources for the spring and summer term. The Campus Store has access to a cutting-edge digital distribution platform that contains dynamic content from a large number of Canadian publishers. OER content from eCampus Ontario, BC Campus OpenEd and copyright free classics are also loaded into this system and can be adopted by faculty for free distribution to students. This platform also enables the store to publish and distribute materials digitally while ensuring DRM, copyright management, royalty management and secure transaction processing are in place. Over the past few years we have worked in partnership with MPS to develop digital e-coursepacks that we distribute through this platform. These are a great digital alternative to a printed coursepack.

The Campus Store course materials team is actively working with content providers to increase the number of digital assets that faculty have access to and are available to assist in any way possible. Please encourage faculty members to reach out to the Campus Store course materials team by email at d-bktext@mcmaster.ca, especially if they need help in locating a digital resource or finding a suitable digital alternative to print.

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES
Staff in Student Accessibility Services (SAS) are available throughout the Spring and Summer sessions to assist students and instructors with academic accommodations. Tips for Accessibility When Moving to Online Course Delivery and answers to frequently asked questions about universal design and accommodations are available on the SAS website. Instructors can reach out to SAS (sas@mcmaster.ca) if they have questions or require additional support.

ONLINE DISCUSSION EXPECTATIONS
As we move current, spring and summer academic programs to virtual classroom settings it is important to remember that the decorum expected in the classroom and in all campus interactions also applies to the online world. The following is a possible message that instructors might convey to students:
Message for students:

McMaster is committed to an inclusive and respectful community. These principles and expectations extend to online activities including electronic chat groups, video calls and other learning platforms.

If you are concerned about your virtual classroom experiences, the Equity and Inclusion Office (EIO) is available to advise and assist students who may be experiencing any equity, accessibility, inclusion, harassment, discrimination or sexual violence concerns. You can reach the EIO at equity@mcmaster.ca.

Thank you for joining us in ensuring that our McMaster online communities are spaces where no one feels excluded and everyone is able to enjoy learning together.

Link: https://equity.mcmaster.ca/contact-us

RESOURCES

For courses that require unique learning experiences beyond lecturing and discussion groups, in order to meet the essential learning outcomes, additional funds may be required to access or create digital resources. These experiences may include access to online resources such as lab or studio simulations or the creation of additional interactive tools for student learning.

Support to the MacPherson Institute from the Provost’s Office will enable the staff to provide additional guidance and resources to instructors in creating supplemental digital learning tools and online courses. If your own Faculty or departments within your Faculty have resources, please let us know so that we can anticipate the necessary MacPherson supports.

Should the cost pressure for creating digital and online tools be onerous to a Faculty or department, the Provost’s Office may assist with the funding. Any requests in this regard should be approved first by the department Chair/Director and the Faculty Dean and then be sent to Kim Dej (avpfac@mcmaster.ca) with the Dean copied on the email.

SESSIONAL LECTURERS AND IMPLICATIONS

For the Virtual Classroom, there will be no additional compensation provided to instructors for teaching. If you have signed appointment letters for Sessional Faculty, please go back and ensure that instructors are aware that the course must be delivered remotely and invite them to attend the online workshops available through the MacPherson Institute. Sessional Faculty members are to be compensated at the post-contract rate ($66.70 per hour) for any hours they are required to attend training that were not identified in their original appointment letter, as approved by their Department Chair. New Sessional Faculty contracts should indicate the requirement for remote teaching and the invitation to attend the MacPherson Institute online workshop.
SCHEDULING
Please review how your Spring and Summer term courses are currently scheduled in Mosaic. You will have received this information about automatic changes to courses delivery notations from the Registrar’s Office:
- In person has been changed to V - Virtual Classroom
- Blended has been changed to ON – Online
- Online – unchanged

The current day/time information will be retained for all class sections, however, for instructors wishing to remove or change the assigned day/time, Timetabling Reps may submit a request by email to the Registrar’s Office. Keeping the assigned day/time is best for synchronous teaching while removing the day/time may be more appropriate for asynchronous teaching. If the automatic change does not reflect a particular course, please contact the Registrar’s Office.

COURSE CANCELLATION
We strongly encourage departments to offer their Spring and Summer courses, if they can do so. If your department is unable to offer a course through any of the above Remote Teaching methods, you may have to cancel the course. Please note that if contracts for Sessional Instructors have been signed, that the individual must be compensated $1000 for a course cancellation that is communicated to the Sessional Instructor more than 2 weeks before the start of term. If a course is cancelled within 2 weeks of the start of term, the cancellation stipend is $4000.

A reminder that the Spring Term start date is May 4 and the Summer Term start date is June 22.