

AGHE Teaching Brief

Adapting Your Final Exams and Assessments

(Adapted from Helpful Hints Compiled by UMass Lowell/UMass Boston Faculty)

As a result of the current remote learning environment caused by the COVID-19 virus, traditional in-person administration of final exams is not an option this semester. As you think about what changes you need to make to adapt your final exams to this unprecedented period, please keep in mind that nobody signed up for this. Many of your students would not have chosen to take a remotely-offered course, just as many of you would not have chosen to teach one. The suggestions and reminders below are intended to help faculty and students have a successful final exam period in Spring 2020.

Key Tips for Final Exam and Assessment Planning

1. Keep it simple
2. Review learning outcomes
3. Adapt your assessment
4. Use a low-tech approach, or use the features of learning technology to address your concerns about academic integrity
5. You don't need to reinvent the wheel
6. We're in this together

1. Keep it simple

Avoid adding technological hurdles, and plan around students' real constraints.

Before deciding on a new assignment or assessment, check your assumptions about the technology that you're requiring, including bandwidth limitations, students who may be sharing computer time with others, and students who do not have access to a printer or video camera.

Ensure that you are providing accommodations for students registered with Disability Services.

This is a matter of equity, and - in terms of students with disabilities - the law; keeping things simple is the best way to proceed.

Things to avoid...

- Don't create a final that requires equipment that was not required at the start of the course, or campus facilities that students can no longer access.
- Don't schedule a "live" exam at any time other than the one assigned to your course by the Registrar.

2. Review your learning outcomes

Which outcomes are absolutely critical for students to demonstrate on the final?

Review your outcomes and design an exam that gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of the course learning outcomes, bearing in mind that other outcomes may not need to be assessed at this time. Have they already demonstrated some outcomes that you can set aside for the final?

3. Adapt your assessment

One size definitely does not fit all!

Ideas for changing your final exams and assessments that still allow students to demonstrate their learning:

- Make exams open book or untimed. Students' ability to find or apply the right answer might be more critical than their recall. (See below for tips from Rutgers about doing this in quantitative courses)
- Avoid assessments that require complex setups or instructions. With technology and support systems stretched keeping things simple will help to ensure that the assessment runs smoothly - and if there is a problem that it can be resolved more quickly.
- Consider allowing collaborative exam completion. Yes, some students may do more work than others, but students are pretty sharp about not being taken advantage of. You could ask students also to provide an individual reflection (e.g. what they had mastered, what they couldn't do on their own, etc.).
- Rather than doing, for example, 5 problems, have students select one and then write a short paragraph to explain the process. Or have students select one and write a paragraph to explain the applied use of the process.
- Turn multiple choice tests into short answer tests and reduce the number of items.
- Offer students who are doing well the ability to opt-out of the exam.

Resist the urge to make your finals harder or longer! We're all under a lot of pressure.

4. Use a low-tech approach, or use the features of learning technology to address your concerns about academic integrity.

Many of us are understandably concerned about academic integrity in this remote learning environment. Although it is important to be flexible, you have every right to expect and require your students to complete their courses honestly. Below are some steps to consider to ensure the integrity of your exams.

Arrange for final presentations using your LMS resources or Zoom, and have students or groups to share their screens.

- Students can simultaneously present and share any slides/visuals.
- Ask others to mute their microphones to minimize feedback noise.
- Log into the room ahead of time to be sure it is functional.
- Schedule a Zoom meeting in advance and invite attendees.
- Add a password and enable a waiting room, to make it more secure.
- Have an alternate plan for students that are unable to participate or who do not have a camera (e.g., send a narrated slide deck that you can share on screen).

Create a final paper in your LMS using the Assignment tool.

- Have students submit to [SafeAssign](#) or [Turnitin](#) (for academic integrity checking). Check the capacities of your LMS system and technology support.
 - SafeAssign is a feature within Blackboard Assignments.
 - Turnitin is a 3rd party integration within Blackboard (available in the Tools menu).
 - Information about using these features is available via the [Quick Start Guide](#).

Create a test using available technology and support personnel.

- Create a test in your LMS (from scratch) or import tests using resources like [Respondus](#).
- Limit the amount of time students have to complete the test (don't use "force-completion").
- Modify test questions to require unique answers that students are less likely to copy and share.
- Add variety and/or randomization to exam questions and answers, so not all students get the same questions; Blackboard tests have this capability.
- If possible, try out your LMS assessment tool ahead of time by using the student preview to make sure it works the way you intend.
- If the assessment method is brand new to your students, give them a practice example to help them become familiar with the new format and lower any anxiety.

5. You don't need to reinvent the wheel

Check out these practical tips from other universities.

- Rutgers University's specific, [practical tips for going open-book in quantitative courses](#).
- Indiana University Bloomington's [suggestions for adapting assessments](#)
- UC Berkeley's list of ideas for [alternative assignment types](#)
- Brigham Young University's descriptions of several [final exam alternatives](#)

6. We're all in this together!

If you have other suggestions, please share them with the AGHE Community and the COVID-19 Community on [GSA Connect](#)