

## Improving the Distance Learning Experience: What We Can Learn from Students' Feedback on the Winter 2020 Term

In May of 2020, Dawson students were surveyed about their online courses. Below are some of the main themes that emerged from [the survey results](#) - and some ideas to address them - for your consideration as you plan for the next term.

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### LEARNING OUTCOMES & ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

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*Many students were apprehensive about assessment/tests, and were worried that they would not be able to properly complete an assessment. Here are some ideas to alleviate some of your students' anxiety:*

- In the first class, go through your expectations for the course, including what assessments and activities will take place.
- Clearly state what learning outcomes and competencies you would like your students to achieve and what topics will be covered.
- Ensure that assessments are linked to learning outcomes and that these are clear to students. Explain what will be expected of your students in the final assessment.
- If using a Learning Management System (LMS) like Moodle, include several short formative assessments (low stakes or no marks) so that students can practice using the technology, test their knowledge and build confidence as they progress through the course.
- Offer students regular feedback so that when it comes time for the final assessment, they will feel better prepared.
- If possible, have all assignments due on the same day of the week and at the same time (ie, Fridays at noon) to facilitate students' time management.

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### MANAGING YOUR ONLINE COURSE COMMUNITY

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*One of the major concerns seen in the survey results was that many students felt that the workload had increased since the shutdown, and that they were overwhelmed. Additionally, many students and teachers felt disconnected from each other. To prevent workload-creep and address isolation, keep the following in mind:*

- Asynchronous work that is given to the students to replace "live" contact hours can sometimes take longer for the students to complete, adding to the perception of increasing workload. To prevent this, give students an indication of how much time you expect them to spend on asynchronous work.

- Despite being at home, students often have less time for learning (sharing computers, working, caring for younger siblings/children, etc.).
- Consider allowing 50% extra time to complete online assessments.
- Encourage discussion groups, not just for in-class discussions but also for group check-ins and simply to talk with peers (online equivalent of hallway conversations).
- Consider assigning study groups: 4-6 students form a group to study together in a way and at a time that works for them.
- Include your students in community-building, especially at the beginning: ask them to create course avatars; to record a short introductory video; to create a Facebook page.
- Reaching out to individual students when necessary may help them feel more included.

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## TECHNOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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*Students concerns about technology included internet stability, a perception of too many platforms/technological tools to use, privacy concerns, and lack of equipment at home. Here are some things to consider when planning the technology component of your course:*

- Students reported that they had to learn to use many platforms which made their overall load more difficult to manage. When possible, use those that are supported by Dawson College. When this is not possible, try to coordinate with other faculty in the program to limit the number of extra platforms or software the student will have to manage.
- Students may be sharing computers, accessing the courses through cell phones, have unstable and/or be sharing WIFI. Many may not have printers or scanners. When possible, offer alternative ways to participate in class, submit assignments and/or access course material.
- Some students may not have a quiet place to work in during the day. Keep this in mind when assigning or scheduling something with your students.
- While seeing blank squares on Zoom is frustrating, there are many valid reasons why students might not want to turn on their webcam. An alternative: ask your students to create an avatar for that class (excellent icebreaker as well). Set clear requirements and communicate them to students at the beginning of the semester. Allowing for exceptions on a case-by-case basis will give you the flexibility to adapt to a student's needs, within reason.

Please visit the [Faculty Hub](#) regularly for new resources!

