

Staff at the Centre for Science in Society have taught online and blended courses for several years and through this time have trialled and iterated a number of tools. Our courses have high completion rates and receive excellent student evaluations. Here are some ideas for keeping your lecturers sane and students engaged.

This advice covers our top ideas for adapting to online teaching in an emergency situation. A lot more is involved with creation of a customised and sustainable online learning environment.

CAD are the experts on online course design and we have worked closely with them since we first started offering online courses back in 2011. This document is supplementary advice to their development sessions based on our experience of the day-to-day running of online courses.

If requested, we can share a past iteration of one of our online courses for you to explore, SCIS 211 from T1 2019. Please email hazel.godfrey@vuw.ac.nz your Blackboard username for guest access. Then explore the tabs on the left hand side, especially 'Key Information', 'Discussion Forum', and 'Private Journal' to see how these key spaces are set-up.

Keeping lecturers sane

- **Don't try and turn your course into a perfect online course overnight**

Return to your learning objectives and think about how you can best achieve that, online, in the short term. It won't create the ideal course, but it will create a manageable and sustainable course.

- **You don't have to do it all yourself**

Are there alternative readings, YouTube clips, documentaries, news articles etc that could introduce students to the topic in place of a lecture that you usually present? If so, consider setting that as homework and using your class time (if you're staying synchronous) or the discussion fora to discuss content and generally support the mental well-being of your students.

- **Use recordings from past years**

If you've recorded lectures in the past (e.g., with Panopto) and are delivering essentially the same lecture this year – give yourself a break and give them the link to that video instead. They can watch it in their own time and you can then discuss it with them. Only use lectures you presented and avoid using lectures with students in the recording. You can edit lectures in Panopto (e.g., trimming start/end: <https://support.panopto.com/s/article/Edit-a-Video>).

Warning – this is not ok to do for your entire course, just a suggestion for the first week or two while you're transitioning to online teaching!

- **Consider asynchronous teaching**

Save real-time connection (e.g., through Zoom) for the really amazing interactive discussions... everything else can be made asynchronous, allowing you to prepare that lecture in advance and upload it, and allowing students to either download it or log in at a time that is most convenient for them in their new situations.

Keeping students engaged

Online courses do not run by themselves, students need to know that teaching staff are present in the course and care about their progress. Consider flexibility around deadlines and be compassionate in your messages. Your messages become their main point of contact with you, and their experience of the course is affected by their interactions with you.

- **Set up private journals (rather than emails) and check them daily**

We have found that setting up a private journal inside Blackboard is a really amazing way to create a safe, private, space for a conversation between the lecturer and a student. It's the online version of having a chat before or after class. It is also FAR easier to follow the conversation than wading through lots of emails. It's a great way for students to know they can contact you easily, and for you to respond in a timely manner.

- **Use the discussion fora in Blackboard**

We use discussion fora a lot, and even if students don't appear to engage, they do read those conversations and find them helpful (an analogy is the quiet student at the back of the chatty class who still benefits from the chat). Consider setting up separate fora, e.g., for different components of your course (content related), for technical questions, for administrative questions (deadlines, assignment clarification) and other issues that students wish to discuss.

For large classes, which already have tutor support, consider asking those tutors to spend some time in the discussion fora as a "chatter" – to respond to student questions in the discussion forum, to post questions and comments to get the discussion moving and generally help stimulate discussion and make students feel supported and listened to.

- **Make Regular announcements**

Use the "Create Announcement" function to post regular updates to students, starting with a regular Monday announcement about what they should be focusing on that week, and also with reminders about deadlines, check-ins to see how they're doing, etc

- **Consider having office hours through Zoom**

All staff can get a Zoom account. Set office hours where you'll be available to students. Paste the link into Blackboard. Have Zoom open and then just get on with your usual work during that time - it's just like normal office hours, but virtual. You can apply the same concept to tutorials.

CAD

Please see CAD for additional training and advice. For example, CAD can support you in developing effective, best-practice, multichoice online quizzes.

CAD are also running hive course development training sessions which cover using tools such as Zoom in your online teaching and review of your courses to ensure they are intuitive and accessible. You can book a hive session by going to https://vuw.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8qtZKJtyV8InYQI Note that there may be a wait for a session.

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