

Teaching During a Pandemic Flu Season – Ideas to Consider FAQ for MU Instructors

“It’s clearly not a matter of if, Mr. Schenfeld said. “It’s a matter of when – and how much.” - *As Colleges Prepare for Flu, CDC Releases New Guidelines*, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Student Affairs, 8/20/2009.

“We need to prepare for the worst and hope for the best.” – Tom Skinner, CDC spokesman

MU instructors will have a key role in helping their students cope with the stresses of a pandemic flu season. – MU Administrator

Instructors experienced with teaching during disasters stress the importance of planning ahead for the unexpected. Having a contingency plan for teaching (or sequence of strategies) can save valuable time and effort for both you and your students. It may also provide a sense of continuity and security for students seeking reassurance. The following frequently asked questions and applicable checklists of recommendations have been compiled from instructors, staff, administrators, and students at MU.

1. How do I start preparing for teaching through a pandemic flu season?
2. What are the best-practices for teaching online during the flu season?
3. What kind of information do I need to facilitate learning and communication?
4. How can I help my students prepare for teaching and learning changes during the flu season?
5. What should I do if just a few of my students cannot attend my class?
6. What should I do if a significant number of students can’t attend my class?
7. What should I do if I feel sick or have to serve as a care-giver?
8. How can I perform student assessments when so many are absent from class?

How do I start preparing for teaching through a pandemic flu season?

The most effective and efficient way to keep teaching – and keep your students learning – is to create an online experience. As soon as possible...

- Request a Blackboard course site for each of your courses** (if you do not have sites already). Go to <http://courses.missouri.edu>, click on the link “Request course site” under the Blackboard section.
- Review your course objectives, assignments, and schedule.** Prioritize and identify those requirements that may be essential during the flu season.
- Practice and become familiar with using Blackboard tools** that fit with your class requirements and teaching style –the discussion board, posting materials, assignment tool, quizzes, grade-book, chat, white-board, etc. Learn to accomplish these tasks yourself as administrative staff or teaching assistants may not be available in an emergency situation. Blackboard faculty help can be found at <http://courses.missouri.edu>, “Faculty help” under the Blackboard section.

What are the best-practices for teaching online during the flu season?

- Review The ET@MO Faculty to Guide to Teaching and Learning with Technology** for tips and recommendations in putting together and teaching an online course. Go to <http://etatmo.missouri.edu>, click on “Teaching Toolbox”, select *The ET@MO Faculty Guide to Teaching and Learning with Technology*.
- To view a practical example of a model Blackboard course site, email blackboard@missouri.edu** and ask to be registered for ET@MO’s *Sample Course for Instructors*.
- Starting with the materials that are most critical for your course, develop syllabus, readings, and other class materials in digital format** (e.g. PDF’s, PowerPoint, JPG images, web links, Camtasia files, Wimba audio files, Tegrity audio or video files, etc.). Remember that this will be a “work-in-progress”, adding items as you are able. The more you have in your Blackboard course site, the more your students will have to support their online efforts if they have to be away from the classroom.
- Make sure each assignment and exam has explicit directions and a detailed checklist for success and grading.**

What kind of information do I need to facilitate learning and communication?

- Identify those students in your class who do not have access to a computer** in their dorm room, apartment, or home. These students may need alternative options or deadlines for completing course requirements.
- Identify those students in your class who do not have high-speed internet access** and only use dial-up in their apartment or home. These students will not be able to access video easily and may need alternative options. Or they may need alternative/optional assignments or flexible deadlines for completing course requirements.
- Know how to access students’ contact information in *myZou* through the Class Roster.**
- Know MU’s policies regarding pandemic flu procedures**, revised attendance policies, and MU’s requirements for withdrawals and/or refunds. Have this information accessible so you will be prepared to answer student questions.
- Work with your department to ensure there is a back-up peer instructor** who can assist with your class if you cannot teach during an emergency situation. Be sure that your peer instructor has access to your Blackboard course site by sending an email to blackboard@missouri.edu requesting access.
- Maintain a list of important contacts** and their communication information (your departmental colleagues, DoIT Help Desk, ET@MO Blackboard support, Counseling Center, etc.).
- For assistance or answers to teaching and technology questions, contact ET@MO staff** via the ET@MO web page – <http://etatmo.missouri.edu>, “Request assistance” link in the right column. Also check ET@MO’s Events Calendar for a schedule of workshops designed for instructors needing assistance.

How can I help my students prepare for teaching and learning changes during the flu season?

- Include information in your syllabus about your contingency plans** for teaching and learning during the uncertainties of a pandemic flu season.

- Include information in your syllabus regarding online class procedures and netiquette.** For examples, see syllabus guidelines in [The ET@MO Faculty to Guide to Teaching and Learning with Technology](#) or the syllabus example in ET@MO's *Sample Course for Instructors*.
- Introduce students to your Blackboard course site and require completion of an assignment** that uses the most important Blackboard tools for your course. Stress that they can get additional information at Blackboard student help site – <http://courses.missouri.edu>, click on “Student help” under the Blackboard section.
- Help students understand the differences between face-to-face discussion and online discussions** where nonverbal cues aren't possible. Reinforce the importance of respect and consideration during online communications.
- Alert your students in advance about any software they will need to complete their course assignments.** Provide explicit direction on how to obtain and download the software. Encourage students to download the software as soon as possible on their personal computers in preparation for any unexpected flu situations.

What should I do if just a few of my students cannot attend my class?

- Remind students about your contingency plans** for online teaching and learning.
- Increase your use of the Blackboard course site** for posting materials and online discussions. Some of your students may be caring for sick family or recovering, and will still be able to take part in your online course.
- Communicate regularly with your online students** so they still feel connected to the learning community in your class.
- Encourage classroom-based students to communicate and share notes with absent classmates.**
- Reassure ill students that you will be flexible** with assignment and exam deadlines if needed.
- Reinforce that students who are feeling ill should not come to class** until 24 hours after their fever is gone (without fever-reducing medication).
- Monitor student feedback as your course starts shifting more to online teaching.** Use MoCAT to survey students - if you do not have an account, email mocat@missouri.edu. Information is available at <http://mocat.missouri.edu>; follow the link to online documentation and tutorials at the top of the page.
- Monitor absence statistics in your class and at MU** so you can better anticipate when and how much to increase online teaching.

What should I do if a significant number of students can't attend my class?

- Follow MU policies and guidelines.**
- Maintain your daily routine** as much as possible.
- Be sure that course materials are easily available on your Blackboard course site.**
- If synchronous communication is important, then consider arranging typed chat, Wimba voice chat, audio IM, or Skype connections** during your face-to-face lecture. If you use these tools, request that students log in and work on course requirements during their usual class meeting times.
- Require all students to take part in online group discussions.** Encourage healthy students to share their notes with those who could not attend class.

- Communicate regularly with students online**, encouraging their efforts, clarifying their assumptions, etc.
- Use the Announcements location in Blackboard to update students** regarding the status of your course, deadline changes, as well as the location of MU pandemic flu information.
- Plan to offer flexibility in assignment deadlines** for those who have little or no computer access.
- If group assignments are part of your course requirements, then allow more flexibility** as groups have to communicate and complete their work online.
- Redesign tests from in-class exams to take-home online exams.**
- Be honest and open about the pandemic flu situation at MU.** Keep the lines of communication open. Allow students to express their feelings privately as a means of support.
- Maintain communication** with your department chair and colleagues.
- Students showing signs of depression or grief may need additional support.** Be willing to share contact information as appropriate.
- As the number of absences increases, modify your strategies as needed for a totally online course.** Use the techniques described in the sections above.

What should I do if I feel sick or have to serve as a care-giver?

- Alert your department chair and peer-instructor about your condition.** Try to maintain communication as much as is needed.
- Let your peer-instructor know where you keep your course plans, lecture notes, etc.** Remind your peer-instructor how to access your Blackboard course site.

How can I perform student assessments when so many are absent from class?

- Assess class participation by monitoring the quality of participation and comments in online group discussions.**
- Redesign assignments as needed so that they may be more easily completed at home or online.** Use the Blackboard Assignment tool to coordinate students' submitting assignments online.
- As your course shifts more to online teaching and learning, consider dividing your content into smaller chunks and offering more online self-tests or quizzes** to make sure students are grasping the concepts. If you need assistance with setting up the Quiz feature in Blackboard, check the online "Faculty help" link at <http://courses.missouri.edu> or email blackboard@missouri.edu .
- Redesign class-based tests that might occur during the flu season to take-home online exams.**
- Check that each assignment, quiz, and exam has explicit directions and a detailed description of your expectations.**
- Plan to offer flexibility in assignment deadlines** for 1) students who have little or no computer availability and/or high speed internet access or 2) for group assignments that now depend on online communication and work.