

RADFORD UNIVERSITY

Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning

Guide to Adaptive Final Assessments, Spring 2020

The rapid shift to remote teaching and learning this semester, and the consequent stress on both students and faculty members, requires a thoughtful and creative approach to the assessment of student learning. As you consider final exams and other end of term assessments, we recommend the following:

Don't:

- Approach the process of choosing final assessments from a negative or punitive perspective
- Simply put your face to face final exam online without revision
- Assume all your students will have stable internet access, a stable home, and the amount of time they would usually have to complete assignments (many students may have taken on more employment to help make ends meet in their households)
- Assume that your students can easily navigate the online learning environment (keep in mind that our students may have five or six different courses, all using the LMS differently, with little previous experience with online learning)
- Assume that your students are able to use Respondus or other lockdown software (for example, students with Chromebooks will be unable to use Respondus).
- Use technology just for the sake of using it (save that for when you have more time)

Do:

- Approach the process of choosing final assessments from a positive perspective of compassion and empathy, and think about what will enable learning
- Ask what activity will best allow students to display that they have met the course learning outcomes
- Keep it simple: just because technology is available doesn't mean you have to use it, unless both you and your students are already accustomed to it.
- Consider alternatives to traditional final exams, such as "signature" assignments (below)
- Consider offering multiple options for students to fulfill the final assessment (give students a choice between a final exam or a portfolio, for example)
- Offer an explanation of why you chose the assignment and how to complete it (including a rubric)
- Keep in mind that your assessments should be accessible, and should be consistent with student accommodations in your class
- Have a back-up plan for students who may not have stable internet access or who may become ill
- Practice trauma-informed pedagogy: https://edprepmatters.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CopingwithCoronavirus_Collection.pdf

Why should we consider avoiding traditional final exams?

1. Respondus may not work for all students, and it can be stressful if the technology is new to them (this may not be a concern if your class is accustomed to using Respondus).
2. Because of the unique circumstances of this semester (students may have additional employment, may have become ill, or may be caring for family members), it may be difficult for some students to be as successful in the online environment as they would be in person.
3. It may be difficult to offer accommodations for students with disabilities on a traditional final exam in a remote teaching situation.
4. Students may have multiple exams all in the same couple of days, which may be difficult with household and employment obligations.

Alternatives to traditional final exams:

1. **Signature assignments:** cumulative projects that ask students to display their mastery of the learning outcomes, such as portfolios, team projects, or creative work (such as podcasts or blogs).
2. **Reflective assignments:** ask students to show their mastery of the learning outcomes by reflecting on their progress through the semester.
3. **A series of lower-stakes quizzes:** this may be useful for large classes since online quizzes can be auto-graded.
4. **An open-book, take-home final exam:** you could invite students to ask and answer some of their own questions (“Write five true/false questions and explain why the questions are relevant and why your answers are correct”).
5. **An essay or podcast with a real-world application** of the semester’s learning (perhaps even applied to the pandemic).
6. **A “teach-back”:** have students develop a presentation (video, podcast, poster) in which they teach the important concepts from the class.

Whatever final assessment you choose, be transparent.

Tell your students:

- **Why** you are asking them to do the assignment
- **What** to do and **how** to do it (be clear)
- What your **expectations** are (use rubrics; show examples of what a successful assignment looks like)

For more ideas, contact any member of the [Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning](#)