

Testing alternatives. (Source: UC Davis)

► What are alternative assessments to consider other than exams and tests?

When looking for ways to ensure continuity of instruction, you might wonder whether and how you will need to modify your exams and other assessments for your class if you need to move your course online. Many assessments (e.g., research papers, written projects, essays, etc.) can be addressed through Canvas or email, and may need little or no modification. However, some assessments (e.g., multiple-choice exams) may require the instructor, TAs, or a proctor to be present. If that is the case, it may be helpful to think about alternative ways to assess your students in the event that online proctoring of exams is not available. Below are some key considerations for thinking about course-level assessments (particularly, multiple-choice exams) in a modified instructional environment. There are some alternative formats for assessing student learning that may be helpful when moving your class online.

► What are alternatives to face-to-face and online proctored exams?

The following suggestions assume that a face-to-face or online proctoring service is **not available**. They are designed to address issues of academic integrity that can arise when exams are administered outside of the classroom.

Shift to an *Open-Book* exam format. This format promotes student learning and can help to neutralize the possibility that students will inappropriately rely on other resources to complete the exam by *allowing* them to consult other resources. The following elements can be added to the exam (alone or in combination) to help ensure that students maintain academic integrity when course assessments happen outside the classroom.

- Add a section to the exam that requires students to give the course-related sources they used to answer each question (including page numbers, where appropriate), as well as the citation information of any other resources they used. Consider telling students they can use outside sources if they also give a well-considered recommendation as to whether the outside sources should be incorporated into the class in future quarters.
- Add a question that asks students to write a short reflection on what they learned, either about the content or about their own learning processes from the process of researching the questions.
- Have students choose one question or problem on the exam that was difficult and explain the process they went through to find the answer and/or to solve it.
- Have students choose the most interesting question or section on the exam and write a short paragraph explaining why they think it was interesting. A variation on this: Have students choose the question or section of the exam that targets information they feel is most applicable to their future careers, and explain why they feel it is valuable for them to know this information.

The "Open Book" option allows students to engage with your full exam as you originally intended, perhaps even more deeply, while incorporating an individual component that reinforces students in practicing academic integrity.

If using the ***Closed-Book format***, you may find the following suggestions helpful. Consider reducing the number of single-choice answers (e.g., multiple-choice questions), in order to add:

- **Short answer questions.** Adding several short answer questions that have been tailored to information presented in lectures gives students a chance to display what they have learned. It

also encourages students to maintain academic integrity by tying their responses to what they learned by attending your class.

- **A metacognition task.** Insert a section where students look at errors on a past exam and explain the correct answer to earn a certain number of points determined in advance by the instructor. This develops metacognition, helps students improve their learning, and makes connections to students' past class performance.
- **A transformative reflection.** Provide a question asking students to write a short reflection on how the course has changed their thinking about the course topic or about a course sub-topic. This helps students become more aware of the effect your class has had on them intellectually.
- **Resource recommendations.** Have students give a recommendation for two scholarly articles, news articles, videos, or other instructional media that the students have researched, by writing a short (1-2 paragraph) explanation of how these pieces could help future students understand the course material.
- **An application task.** Have students choose a question from the exam and explain how the knowledge it tests is important when applied to the field. Make sure you have discussed applications in class, and if not, it may be helpful to let students know that you encourage innovation on this task. If application is something you have not discussed in class, you may want to modify your grading criteria to reflect this.
- **Move to an entirely short-essay exam format.** If possible, convert your multiple-choice questions to a series of questions that require students to write one-to-two-paragraph responses synthesizing course content. Tailor the questions to your course's specific content, to encourage students to produce their own work and to discourage inappropriate reliance on outside sources (i.e., plagiarism). Be sure to let students know the criteria you'll use to evaluate their responses (e.g., a rubric) before they take the exam. If students have been expecting a multiple-choice test throughout the quarter, you may want to be mindful of the effect a sudden change in format can have on students' ability to be successful on the exam, and weigh this against any changes you might make. If you feel the change is warranted, explain to students the reason for the change, and reassure them of your concern for their learning.
- **Assign an annotated bibliography.** If a traditional exam is not possible, and it serves your learning outcomes for your students, you might consider having students write an annotated bibliography in which they choose 5-10 key scholarly articles from the course readings and write a short critical summary for each, explaining what the article is about and then giving their assessment of the article's value to the field. Initially, students may think this is a difficult task, especially if they have never encountered such an assignment. Giving students a model for the task can help, and reminding students that it builds on skills they likely already possess (writing summaries, for example) can go a long way to ease their anxiety. If this is a novel task for students that is being introduced due to external circumstances affecting your course, you may want to adjust your grading criteria accordingly.
- **Assign an application task.** Give students a real-world, problem-based application of the concepts (or just a single key concept) from your course and ask them to explain how they would use the information learned in your class to solve the problem. This would require students to analyze the problem and then synthesize a response to it by revisiting the concepts learned in your course and applying them to the scenario you have described. This, again, could be difficult for some students. If application is something you have not discussed in class, you may want to modify your grading criteria to reflect this.

► **What are some additional considerations?**

Once you have made changes to your course assessments, you may want to keep these suggestions in mind:

- **Communicate with students.** Explain to students why you're making changes. Let them know you view their learning as paramount, and want to give them every opportunity to succeed in your class, even when modifications are necessary.
- **Provide a model** of the types of work you're asking from them. If you are changing your assessment format from tests to short answer questions, for example, give students a model of the type of question they'll receive as well as the type of response that is expected. This is especially important if students have been anticipating one type of exam that has now been changed.
- **Consider modifying your grading structure.** Evaluate your changes to see if you will need to modify your grading structure. Consult with your department or with the CTL (ctl@csus.edu) if you would like assistance in this area.

Assessing students equitably in ways that promote learning is a key part of effective teaching. The staff and faculty mentors at the CTL are available at ctl@csus.edu to help think through and discuss ways to continue to promote learning for all students at Sacramento State.