

***What We Think About When
We Think About Online***

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We're all working through a mental shift from academically leading our students in person to designing and facilitating educational experiences through which students learn to lead themselves despite space and time. UF educators and instructional designers have honed strategies and gathered quality resources over years of teaching online that will help all of us keep teaching students wherever and whenever they are.

Over the last five years UF Online has worked with teams across campus to cultivate an approach to teaching and learning online that prioritizes high-quality coursework and lab environments AND thriving, engaged learning communities. Our resulting foundational model, [Seven Dimensions that Ensure a Thriving Online Learning](#), may also serve as a framework to translate your college's unique culture into a physically-distanced model. In this document, we'll take a deep dive into Dimension 3, Coursework and Labs.

Below you'll find UF resources and tips to support each phase of online teaching and learning as the Gator Nation expands our learning spaces to embrace [#NoWallsTeaching](#).

Be Kind to Yourself

There will be many new habits of mind and unexpected hurdles to conquer as you reinvent your approach to teaching and learning. Moving a course online challenges you to consider why exactly you do what you do and then possibly do things differently. It's transformative so patience with yourself and an open mind will be your most essential tools.

The nicest thing you can do for yourself is start as soon as possible! There is no sugar coating the fact that online course production is time-consuming. The more work you do up front, the more you and your students will benefit. Regardless of where you're starting your experience with online teaching, you'll find that looking at your course through a new lens will inevitably produce a new picture. Hopefully, you'll join other instructors in discovering that [Teaching Online will Make you Better at Teaching in Any Setting](#).

Don't go it alone!

High-quality online course production in Canvas takes more time and expertise than the many instructors can spare.

Enter UF Instructional Designers! These trained professionals are educated in best practices for designing and delivering sound education online. They're trained to help you take your content and deliver it online in a way that brings out the best in you and your students.

Get One-on-one Assistance

- [Request Assistance for Residential Online Course Builds](#) from the [Center for Instructional Technology and Training](#)(CITT).
- Request a [Course Development, Zoom, or Canvas Consultation, Attend a Webinar, or access a recorded presentation](#) targeted specifically to the needs of instructors at UF.

Short on time and need something independently-paced?

- Visit the [UF e-Learning Keep Teaching website](#).
- Visit [Center for Teaching Excellence Online Teaching Resources](#).
- Access [Quick and Dirty Tips for Online Course Delivery at UF](#).

Teaching and learning is a personal practice that evolves with each semester your course runs. We like to think of that evolution as a 4-phase cycle: Design, Build, Teach, and Reflect. Below are some resources to get you started and support you as you work through each phase.

1. Design

Quality is important: this is UF and your class should demonstrate that UF is a leader in innovative and engaging learning environments.

As an instructor at UF, you have access to the Center for Teaching Excellence [Great Online Course Series](#). This online, self-paced workshop is aimed at supporting instructors as they work toward building [Exemplary Online Courses](#). You'll find practical suggestions to guide you as you map out your content, build your assignments, and organize your teaching.

Before you begin designing, familiarize yourself the [UF+Quality Matters Standards](#). They are the foundation for producing and evaluating the quality of online courses at UF and will be a useful guide as you look to improve your course each semester.

Map Out Your Content

Start with what you know—your own syllabus!

Like students in face-to-face classes, online students depend on a well-organized syllabus that meets the [UF Syllabus Requirements](#).

You won't have the opportunity to go over the syllabus with your students and they won't be able to ask live questions. To avoid an inbox explosion, update your syllabus to be very explicit and organized.

- Check out a few Ideas for [Creating an Effective Syllabus for Online Learning](#).
- Be prepared to flex! Use your Syllabus as a framework for mapping your course, but recognize that you may change things up as you retool your course for online delivery. If you've taught your course for some time, you may be surprised by how much of your teaching and course content you've internalized over the years. Online course design requires that you deliver that invisible curriculum in writing, video, and images. All that reflection tends to inspire change!
- Create a "syllabus quiz" made up of questions that direct students to critical information. Set up the quiz in Canvas so that students can't access content until they get 100% instead of assigning points.
- After you finalize the content for your course go back and proofread your syllabus! Did you change the order of some assignments? Make updating your course with your most recent syllabus a final task before launching.

UF has many resources to guide you as you develop your online course. During the design phase, play the long game! You'll be tempted to dive right into editing PowerPoints and recording lectures, but you'll find that mapping out your course prior to producing course materials will end up saving you time and headaches while making for a more cohesive course. Remember that in online teaching, design and planning are the big, one-time lifts that typically take months. After that, it's all about teaching, building community, and refining your course delivery.

- Register for [Design a Great Online Course](#) to support your design as you work.
- Access [Faculty Self Service Resources](#) like Canvas templates, checklists, and self-paced online teaching resources such as Michael Wesch's video: ["Teaching Without Walls: 10 Tips for Online Teaching"](#) (10:28).
- Watch [5 Strategies to Enhance Online Learning](#) created by the [UF Center for Instructional Technology and Training](#) for simple ideas that can help communicate your content.
- Access [Tips and Tools for Teaching Online in a Pinch](#).

- [How to be a Better Online Teacher Advice Guide](#) from the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Design with Communication and Community in Mind

Teaching is a form of communication! Design your communication so it suits you, your teaching style and your fluency with technology. Set up-front and clear expectations about how you plan to communicate with students and how you expect them to communicate with you and each other. It's so easy to forget that humans sit behind the screens!

- Explicitly outline your plans in your syllabus and Canvas orientation pages. Are you planning on answering emails over the weekends? Will you be making announcements on certain days?
- Clarify how you want students to reach you, and what your response time will be.
- Consider creating a "Course Questions" discussions board as a central communication hub. When students privately email you with general questions about the course, don't answer them! Kindly redirect them to post in the discussion board instead. Answer them there until students start chiming in with their own answers. You'll be surprised how quickly students step up when they have a good model and encouragement! Of course, still encourage private messages for private matters.
- Expect students and yourself to make some mistakes, especially in the beginning! At the start of the semester, make some extra announcements about items that are going well and what needs improvement.

Having a clear communication routine will help students use their brain power for learning your content instead of navigating your course.

2. Build

Canvas, Your Classroom in the Cloud

You may have used UF's learning management system, Canvas, in your face-to-face classes, maybe to broker materials or store class files. For online users, Canvas is home base for UF students, so it's important that the materials there be easy to find, universally accessible, and visually pleasing.

Canvas is user friendly, but takes a bit of practice to get the most out of it as a teaching tool. If you can carve out the time, you'll find that a training will save you time in the long run.

- Register for [Build a Great Online Course](#) to support your course production as you work.
- Sign up for some Canvas help at [Getting Started with e-Learning](#).
- Access the [Canvas Quick Start Guide](#) to get yourself up and running.
- Bookmark [Canvas Instructor Guides](#) to assist with future questions.

Choosing and Integrating Tools

A search for online teaching or communicating tools will bury you in choices! When choosing technology, keep it simple. UF instructional designers and veteran online instructors have already paved the way by identifying the tools you'll need to manage a classroom. If you're new to teaching online, stick with tools that have already been field tested for quality and security.

- Visit the [Online Teaching Quickstart Guide](#) for easy management ideas using common, supported tools to present content, build community and grade.
- Consider from the beginning that you will be modeling privacy and security practices to your students. Check out the [eLearning Supported Services](#) for tools that are safe and tested.

In order for online teaching to be rewarding and effective, you'll want to get technically comfortable ahead of time to avoid the stress of inevitable technological hiccups in the moment. When you do find you're dealing with one of those hiccups, a message or call to the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) will very likely set you straight!

Testing and Assessment

There are tools to preserve the integrity of your tests even when you're not in the same room with students. When you're administering a test that counts for at least 15% of the course grade, you'll want to make sure proctoring services are in place.

Learn about:

- online proctoring with [Honorlock](#).
- extra testing security with [Respondus Lockdown Browser](#).
- friendly quiz-creation with [Respondus Quiz Creator](#).
- online anti-plagiarism service with [Turnitin](#).

Cost

Cost matters: keep costs down if you can; studies show that if texts are too expensive, students won't even buy them!

- Consider [Open Education Resources](#) or textbook rentals.
- Learn about the [UF All Access program](#).
- Find [Open Source Digital Content](#) curated by the Center for Teaching Excellence.
- Befriend your [Subject Specialist Librarian](#)! They can help source materials and prepare your ADA compliant, electronic [Course Reserves](#) that are easily integrated into Canvas.

Accessibility

UF strives to make education accessible to everyone. Designing your courses to accommodate all learners from the beginning is the right thing to do and it will save you time in the long run.

Visit and bookmark the [Course Accessibility Website](#). Everything you need to make your course, including documents and videos can be found there.

Sign up for the self-paced, [Accessible Online Environments](#) workshop at the Center for Instructional Technology and Training for easy to implement strategies.

Video Captioning

Hearing-impaired students rely on captioning to access content, but also consider that students of courses that are terminology dense also benefit from captions.

[Request captioning for your mediasite videos](#) through the [Disability Resource Center](#).

Screen Reader Accessible Documents

Visually impaired students will require that any documents you use in your course, including your syllabus, be designed to be interpreted by a screen reader.

[SensusAccess](#) is a service available at UF to convert your documents.

Canvas Pages

[ALLY](#) is a digital accessibility tool that scans your e-Learning course and content.

3. Teach

Be there!

Engage, Enlist, Entertain

You're not with students physically so you'll need to think about how to show students you're there with them digitally. We hear about instructor presence a lot, but what that means is different for each individual and their comfort with online tools. How will you be you online?

- Use a blend of communication. It will be impossible for you to respond to everyone, every day so devise a blend of tools, but try for some interaction every day.
- Use casual video in announcements to “talk” to students about real time events or ask interesting questions in discussion chats. These don't have to be high production and can be done right in the [Announcements tool in Canvas](#).
- Plan to provide opportunities for engagement with you, such as remote office hours and/or appointment-only consults using Zoom.
- If you have a large class, create communication hubs. [Break up students into small groups](#) that get to know each other. Have those groups work together a few times that semester.
- [Enlist students in some of the footwork of assignment building or updating](#). In a constantly changing world, resources age quickly and finding reliable information has become as important as the content itself. Part of the assignment or discussion may be to find resources like images or new supportive research.
- Ask for feedback. Students know that communicating online isn't easy. Ask them what they need and how you're doing.
- Give students something to talk about. Is there a weekly news event or current issue that relates to your content that could spark discussion? Think of discussions as an academic conversation that you or students host unlike an assignment that you deliver.

Get students moving!

Remember that you can plan offline activities in online classes.

- Ask students to do things in their homes: in-house activities, experiments, out-of-house observations (within limits during pandemic of course).

This not only breaks up the time in front of a screen, but also allows students an opportunity to share their environments and connect with their classmates.

4. Reflect

When designing your course, don't go for perfection. Go for growth. Plan to improve your course over time based on feedback from students and colleagues, as well as your experience.

Each newly developed UF Online course has a pilot semester and then there is deliberate attention on how to improve it the next term and the term after that. UF Online refreshes courses officially at a minimum every three years.

- [Request an Online Course Review](#) from the Center for Teaching Excellence. All faculty who teach online can request a course review that will give you ideas for improvement. Find out how to [earn a Quality, High Quality or Exemplary designation](#) when you opt-in.

The viewpoints of your students matter and they can help you improve the course while the course is running. All UF Online courses should have a plan designed to hear from students that is outlined in the syllabus and course orientation pages.

- Ask for student feedback through a short mid- and end-of-semester survey in Canvas. If possible, fix the issues that surface from the mid-semester survey as soon as possible.

As you adapt to teaching online, you'll find that your workload as an instructor will shift along with your mindset. Lectures, lessons and course design will be mostly done meaning you can then focus more on incorporating student feedback, engaging in discussions with your students, and continually improving the content and supplemental materials you use in your course or lab.

As online education evolves and your online teaching practice grows, you may experience some times when you feel stuck. Those times are when you have the opportunity to grow the most! Reach out to a colleague that's also teaching online and share resources, take advantage of the resources offered by the [Center for Teaching Excellence](#), or the [Center for Instructional Technology and Training](#), and remember students are students no matter where or when they are.

The University of Florida has been supporting thousands of Gators in fully-remote programs since 2014 via UF Online. For those interested, we also offer some of our lessons learned from our first four years in the front section of our [2019-2024 Plan for UF Online](#), published December 2019. ***We hope you find our experience and seven-part framework useful as you design your own future models for your students in your programs.***