

Online Teaching: Helpful resources and reminders
March 26, 2020

Resources for you. The “[Academic Continuity](#)” website continues to grow in richness of resources. If you haven’t visited it in the past couple of days, be sure to do so before taking the next steps with your class design.

Academic Support. The Writing Desk, Supplemental Instruction (SI), tutoring, multilingual student support, and academic coaching will continue in a virtual format.

Student privacy and FERPA. Although your electronic interactions with students will obviously increase, in many ways moving to online classes will not dramatically change your world with respect to protecting student privacy. While interactions with students that would have occurred in the classroom are now moving online, this doesn't change the treatment of these communications under FERPA. In many courses, classroom participation is a component of a student's grade. This does not have to change, and you do not have to obtain consent from a student before engaging in online posts or email communications, even when these communications are made available to all of the other students in the class.

You should, of course, continue to keep confidential the same information that you would normally keep confidential. Grades on papers or exams, and one-on-one advising should continue to be kept confidential. Also, the fact that certain communications can be shared in class does not mean that this information is acceptable to share more publicly. For example, it would not be appropriate to repost a student's comments outside of the classroom unless the student authorized this or one of FERPA's other exceptions applied.

St. Olaf’s student body is global. That means synchronous teaching involving all of your students at one time may be difficult. Before you plan a synchronous session, you should check with your students about their time zones. Because of potentially significant differences in time zones, many of you will want to offer “asynchronous” classes, and these may well entail recording not only yourself, but also the contributions of your students (see below for guidance on FERPA and recording class sessions). You will want to consider how differences in time zones may also affect assignments and examinations.

You are facing extraordinary challenges. So are your students. Things are changing remarkably at St. Olaf, and for some students, they are also changing remarkably at home. Parents may be suddenly out of a job (and some students may feel that they must seek employment to help out). Younger siblings can be underfoot, and some students are now the family’s main source of childcare. You may need to consider both time zone issues and the complexity of students’ family lives in your class design.

The Center for Advising and Academic Support and Student Life are developing guidance for students regarding their new remote learning environment. For your part, give some thought as

to how you will engage with your students regarding the unknowns and new difficulties that you and they are encountering. If this is a new teaching format for you, we all understand that this first effort may not be your “teaching best.” Similarly for students, this may very well be their first online college course. The fact that the online portion has started halfway through the semester makes things even more challenging for them. You will want to take into consideration the newness of this learning environment for both you and students as you revise assignments and set expectations.

Recording class sessions. Because of the need to accommodate time zones and other student needs, I know that many of you are considering recording your classes. Some have inquired whether doing so creates privacy issues if the recordings include student comments. While this does not raise any additional FERPA issues beyond those discussed above, because students will be participating from different states and countries, it could raise other legal concerns such as compliance with wiretapping laws. To minimize these potential issues, we recommend making it clear to students when you will be recording and for what purpose(s). If your intent is to use recordings for future courses or other academic pursuits, you should use this [Course Recording Release Form](#).

Copyright issues: Just who gets to share information about your course? As provided in the *Faculty Handbook*, faculty members own the copyrights to works created through the teaching of their courses. Your online content is no different; however, because this format makes copying/recording your classes and other materials easy, we encourage you to proactively protect your creative works. Including the symbol “©” is not required in order to have copyright protections over your creative works. Nonetheless, because it serves as an overt notification that you value the work and that you intend it to be protected, we recommend including the symbol on all course content.

In addition to placing a copyright symbol on your materials, we also recommend notifying your class of any parameters you intend to place on copying and redistributing of your classes and course materials. Keep in mind that recording classes may be an accommodation for some students with certain disabilities. When it is, there are strict restrictions on the student’s ability to use and disclose copied materials for any purposes other than their coursework. I encourage you to reach out to CAAS if you have questions or concerns.

Accommodations may need to change as the teaching format changes. Here is a handy [resource site](#), with guidance regarding how students with learning disabilities may experience an online learning environment. Disability and Access Services will communicate with you via the Faculty Portal (which you can also find on the resource site) in regard to changes to your students’ accommodations. If you are concerned that a student’s accommodations will not translate to your online course, or a student discloses any disability-related barriers, please contact Joe Young or Laura Knobel-Piehl.

As you begin to consider how you will administer examinations, keep in mind that Moodle supports testing that allows you to adjust the test-taking duration to accommodate students who need time and a half or double time.

If you can, stick with teaching applications that the College provides. As reported yesterday in an [article in Inside Higher Ed](#), using certain platforms to provide instruction could be problematic if the vendor is collecting information about students and using it for unauthorized purposes. St. Olaf's vendor agreements include provisions requiring the vendor to comply with FERPA, and we maintain control over student education records to ensure FERPA compliance. If you plan to use software that is unique to your course, or if you are uncertain whether St. Olaf has a contract in place that protects student education records, please contact IT.