Weekly Update #4
Remote Teaching and Learning Preparedness Task Force
June 17, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

We are pleased to provide another update on the work of the Remote Teaching and Learning Task Force. This week's message provides both an update on our work over the past week, as well as answers to a few frequently asked questions. We will add more FAQs in coming updates, so if you have any specific questions, please send them along to Janice and Joanne.

Recommendations

At the Task Force meeting on June 11, 2020, the Technology Working Group presented five recommendations which were all approved by the full Task Force.

- Define a baseline set of software tools and services that will be supported by our on-campus support teams.
- Provide students with a recommendation for minimum hardware requirements
- Develop a security checklist for purchasing specialized software
- Providing information about the course delivery mode (synchronous or asynchronous) to students at registration
- Explore technology options for International students in countries where internet is currently prohibited and/or controlled.

The details of each recommendation can be accessed on our website.

Implementation plans

In some situations, Task Force Working Groups are developing implementation plans to ensure that work is coordinated across units and to provide a way to track our progress. Given the broad scope of this work, the tight timeline, and the fact that much of the work is new to StFX, these plans will help guide the follow-through effort.

The following implementation plans were approved by the Task Force and are available on our website

- Professional Development Plan
- Resource Hub for Instructors

Professional Development sessions

We have had tremendous turn-out from faculty members and teaching staff for the PD sessions. In the past week alone, nine sessions were held, each on a different aspect of teaching in an online environment. Each session has been recorded and a link is available on our website so they can be accessed as needed. More of these pedagogy-focused sessions will be announced in the coming week, including one on teaching larger classes.

Beginning on June 17, Continuing and Distance Education and IT Services will present a series of PD sessions that explain how to use the different tools and features of Moodle and Collaborate, at both an introductory and intermediate level. Follow this link for details and to register.

Preparing students for online learning

Early in our work, the Task Force members recognized the importance of preparing students to learn successfully in an online environment and to provide them ongoing support to be successful throughout the term. Two of the Working Groups are focused on the student experience. One group is considering the best ways to prepare students prior to the beginning of courses, including orientation to Collaborate and issues such as academic integrity in the online environment. The other group is examining how academic support services will be delivered through the year. More information about what is being done to prepare students to learn online will be shared in the next update.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if a Task Force recommendation does not work in my specific situation?

With every recommendation that Task Force makes there is recognition that a specific program or discipline may have slightly different needs. If an instructor or Chair feels that there is a strong rationale for another approach in a specific situation, they should present this to their Dean. There is room to explore the pros and cons of other options.

What if our department, faculty members, or teaching staff need to request funds for specialized software or some other teaching tool?

Requests for funds that cannot be covered within normal operating budgets or professional development funds should be brought to your Dean with a clear rationale. They will be reviewed on an ad hoc basis.

Is there any chance that I could have a class where some students are being taught face-to-face and some students in the same class are learning online?

There is no plan at StFX for a model where the same class could have some students learning face-to-face and some learning online. There are significant challenges to providing an equally engaging learning experience for both groups of students in this type of situation. The Task Force is not providing PD for this type of class, and StFX does not have the technical infrastructure that would be required to deliver many courses this way. If situations like this emerge, they would be a rare exception and supported on a case-by-case basis.

My internet at home is not reliable. I'm not sure it will support me teaching online.

With the release of the return-to-campus plan, we now know that all faculty and teaching staff will have access to campus offices and necessary spaces, and with that access to reliable internet. With procedures and protocols in place to support physical distancing, the university anticipates that we will be able to maintain access to campus throughout the coming year. If those protocols are not enough and StFX must return to a situation where we have to reduce the

number of people on campus, priority will be given to those who require access to campus to deliver programs.

I'm concerned about the security of teaching online and about what might happen if my course material is shared without my consent. What are the risks?

While there are security and privacy risks involved in face-to-face teaching, online teaching is a new mode of delivery for many, and individuals need time to understand and assess any additional risk that online teaching might present. The Task Force is preparing PD sessions and resources about online security which will be available in the coming weeks. As a starting point, faculty and teaching staff should plan to use the software and platforms supported by IT Services, which have been vetted for security features. For example, Collaborate and Moodle were selected as the primary online platforms partly because of the extra security features they offer.

Staying informed

The best place to stay in touch with what is happening is by regularly checking in to our [website](#). If you have any additional thoughts or questions, please don't hesitate to reach out through email.

Kind regards,

Janice Landry and Joanne Tompkins
Co-chairs, Remote Teaching and Learning Task Force.