Supporting Course Resiliency: Best Practices for Teaching Staff

The University’s Policy on Academic Continuity (January 26, 2012) states that the “University of Toronto is committed to fulfilling its core academic mission of educating students. It recognizes that events such as pandemic health emergencies, natural disasters, prolonged service interruptions, and ongoing labour disputes are potential threats to academic continuity. Good stewardship requires that the University undertake appropriate planning and preparation to promote continuity.”

The Policy emphasizes the extent to which "resilient course and program design and other preparedness" can minimize the potential for disruption of the University’s academic mission. The following best practices are intended to support Teaching Staff in their efforts to ensure the resiliency of their courses.

Collect and maintain a record of all grades

Ensure that there is a central and accessible record of all grades.

Post critical course materials on the course site

Ensure that students have ongoing access to critical course documents including course syllabi and assignments through the Portal/Blackboard.

Develop communication strategies

Ensure that students can be reached for regular communications through Blackboard or a listserve and provide students with clear guidelines about the use of these tools.

Plan for alternate means for assignment submission

Clarify acceptable modes of assignment submission (e.g. in person, by email, or the Portal/Blackboard’s Assignment Tool) and any additional details or requirements about each mode. For example, when accepting assignments by email, consider specifying acceptable document formats.

A number of online tools available through the Portal/Blackboard provide opportunities for the facilitation of assignments and assessments. More information about using these and other tools to support course resiliency is available on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI ) website at http://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/strategies/continuity-planning/
Understand the framework for modifying course evaluation methods

Become familiar with the policies governing grading practices

Even if the potential modification of course evaluation methods has not been clearly identified to students at the outset of the course, evaluation methods can still be changed under the Grading Practices Policies with the consent of at least a simple majority of the students enrolled in the course. If a decision is made to change the evaluation methods or their relative weights, then the consent of students may be obtained by a vote taken in class or through Blackboard or email.

Consider incorporating online learning activities:

Consider supplementing courses with on-line activities. Interactive tools available through the Portal/Blackboard and other sources include web conferencing, lecture capture, online discussion, and survey and assessment tools. Further information regarding these suggested instructional strategies is available on the CTSI website http://teaching.utoronto.ca/ed-tech/online-learning/

CTSI staff are available for assistance in using specific tools or implementing particular approaches. Instructional technology support staff located within divisions may also be consulted for support in implementing activities to engage students using online activities.