

Improving UW's Resources for Remote Teaching

Winter 2021 Survey Findings

UW Tri-Campus Digital Learning Alliance

In spring 2020, experts on digital learning from UW Seattle, UW Tacoma, and UW Bothell (newly named the UW Tri-Campus Digital Learning Alliance) worked together to highlight existing resources and develop new materials to support the shift to remote teaching and learning. These resources were made available to instructors across all three campuses.

In autumn 2020, we developed a survey to assess whether UW instructors were aware of or had used the resources we shared, and if so, which types of resources were most helpful. In addition, we asked instructors where they had experienced success with remote instruction, and where they were struggling. The survey was distributed at the end of January 2021.

Sample

We sent a survey invitation via email to a total of 931 instructors from UW Bothell, UW Seattle, and UW Tacoma who had either participated in UWB or UWT tech courses in 2020 or who had registered for the Learning Technologies Canvas site on teaching remotely. Of these, 179 (19%) responded. In addition, we advertised the survey through a banner on Canvas Jan. 27- Feb. 7; 66 instructors responded, for a **total of 245 respondents**.

Participants were asked to indicate how many courses originally designed for in-person instruction they had adapted to teach remotely. **Most respondents (34%) had adapted four or more courses for remote instruction.** Only nine respondents (4%) had adapted no courses at the time of the survey (perhaps because their courses are normally online); the remaining respondents were evenly divided across one, two, or three courses (22%, 19%, and 21% respectively).

Findings

Resource use and awareness

Survey respondents were asked to indicate which types of resources they were aware of and/or had used to make the transition to remote teaching and learning. The relatively high percentages in the first column of Table 1 below suggest that respondents were fairly familiar with and making use of the full range of remote teaching resources available.

Table 1. Respondents' use/awareness of resources

	Have used	Aware of, not used	Unaware of
UW information hubs	130 (56%)	52 (22%)	51 (22%)
Canvas resources	196 (82%)	33 (14%)	10 (4%)
UW facilitated / self-paced courses	107 (46%)	90 (38%)	38 (16%)
UW workshops or webinars	120 (52%)	93 (40%)	20 (9%)
UW-created videos	102 (43%)	69 (29%)	65 (28%)
Email support/Zoom office hrs	146 (62%)	66 (28%)	25 (11%)
Resources for students	98 (42%)	75 (32%)	61 (26%)

The top three resources that respondents reported they **had used** were

- Canvas resources
- Email support/Zoom office hours
- UW information hubs

Of the group that had received the email survey invitation, over half (56%) also reported using UW workshops or webinars.

Of resources that respondents reported that they were **aware of but had not used**, the top three were:

- UW workshops or webinars
- UW-facilitated or self-paced courses
- Resources for students

Of the group that responded to the survey via the Canvas banner, one-third also reported that they were aware of but had not used UW-created videos.

Top among the resources respondents indicated they were **unaware of** were

- UW-created videos
- Resources for students
- UW information hubs

Resources considered most helpful

When asked to select the **general types** of resources they found **most helpful**, respondents appeared to prefer those resources that could offer them individualized or discipline-specific guidance on their courses, or resources that they could access when it was convenient for them. They selected in descending order:

Online office hours/email support	128
Peer support	123
Videos	102

Information hubs	101
Self-paced short courses	91
Workshops	61
Webinars	60
Facilitated courses	52
Other	14

The 14 respondents who selected “other” wrote in additional resources such as department and UW IT specialists, resources found online, and help from students.

When asked about **Canvas-specific types** of resources they found **most helpful**, the top choice – model Canvas courses created by UW faculty – was one that would provide them with (potentially) discipline-specific guidance by a trusted peer. Time-saving resources – the readiness checklists and course templates – were the next most popular.

Model Canvas courses created by UW faculty	100
Canvas course readiness checklists	97
Canvas course templates	95
“UW Resources” tab in Canvas	67
Other	32

The “other” Canvas-specific resources cited by 32 respondents included Canvas help content, one-on-one support, peer support, UWB teaching online courses, UWT iTech model course, and previous/colleagues’ Canvas courses.

Successes/Challenges with remote instruction

Survey respondents were asked what elements of remote instruction they had found success with and what elements they found challenging. As indicated in Table 2 below, respondents appeared to vary widely in their selections, suggesting that where instructors have found success and where they continue to be challenged is largely individual. Perhaps encouraging to note, survey respondents selected more elements in total on the question about successes (1588) than challenges (1157).

Table 2. Respondents’ successes/challenges with remote instruction

	Success	Challenge
Preparing for class/for the quarter	155	24
Figuring out what to teach via what platform	157	42
Handling questions/sharing in Zoom	145	46
Keeping students engaged during Zoom sessions	97	133
Facilitating community among students	81	134
Using collaborative documents, spaces	101	50

Managing small group work	97	65
Getting good discussions going	62	120
Moving away from high-stakes assessment	115	21
Offering more flexible class structure	116	34
Offering more flexible grading	93	29
Providing accessible materials	102	40
Handling students in a range of time zones	88	50
Handling student tech problems (inconsistent wifi, etc.)	46	96
Managing my capacity for Zoom/being online	76	30
Managing my students' capacity for Zoom/being online	51	105

On the whole, *many respondents appeared to be comfortable with the basics of remote instruction*: preparing their courses, figuring out what to teach using what platform, and using the features in Zoom. A fair number of respondents also reported having success with offering a more flexible class structure and moving away from high-stakes assessments, providing accessible materials, and using collaborative documents/spaces.

The *challenges appear to be in the interpersonal realm*; many respondents indicated they are struggling with creating community among their students and encouraging interaction and engagement. Managing students' capacity for being online was a runner-up to these challenges.

There were no significant differences in the answers to these questions among instructors who had adapted different numbers of in-person courses for remote instruction.

Additional resources

The survey also included an open-ended question asking respondents to describe any additional types of help or resources that they would like to see provided. We analyzed the 99 comments and grouped them by themes. The top suggestions/requests are described below.

Table 3. Additional help/resource requests by theme

Individualized support	Instructors have needs and questions specific to their own classes that can't be answered with general help guides. A few mentioned that one-on-one consultations or someone to reduce their work load would help. (15)
Translating ideas into practice	Instructors understand what they should be doing but not necessarily how to do it. (12)
Engagement	Instructors want help engaging students, in discussion groups and in general (11)
Centralized/organized information	Instructors are overwhelmed with too many sources of information. Seeing all resources in a centralized place would save time and energy, and also prevent

	important resources from slipping through the cracks. (9)
Software	Instructors want access to or integrations with tools like online whiteboards, Adobe, etc. (8)
Resources for students	Instructors are shouldering the responsibility of providing technical and emotional support for students. This can be overwhelming and time-consuming, and instructors want student resources for these issues. (7)
Support for low access students	Instructors expressed concerns about serving the needs of students with low tech/internet access, students with disabilities, and students in countries with banned sites (6)
Hardware	Instructors want access to hardware (mics, headsets, monitors) and best practices for teaching set-ups. One instructor mentioned financial difficulties associated with buying hardware for remote teaching. (5)
Peer faculty support	Past success with or desire for discussing/learning about best practices from other faculty, especially those in similar departments. (4)
Pros/cons of different platforms	There's confusion between similar platforms (eg. Zoom vs Panopto), and instructors want to understand pros/cons and when to use each. (3)
Work-life balance	Instructors expressed difficulty balancing teaching with childcare and mental health (3)
Training	Instructors would like formal trainings on best practices for remote teaching (3)
Hybrid instruction preparation	Instructors want to know how to teach in a hybrid format as fall quarter approaches. (3)

Eight write-in responses also expressed appreciation for the resources offered and/or an acknowledgement that the resources were very helpful.

Information sources

A final question on the survey asked participants to select the **information sources they were most likely to read** (in order to help the Tri-Campus Digital Learning Alliance know where to share new resources and information). The top two sources were Canvas banners and the UW Insider weekly news from UW-IT. The remaining options received considerably fewer votes.

Canvas banners	124
UW Insider	110
Message from Provost	79
Social media	67
Newsletters	23

Thirty-four respondents also wrote in “other” options. Twenty of these were requests for email – email from chair, division head, or program manager, colleagues, CTL, or “Darcy at UWT.” Three requested specifically targeted emails, or as one person wrote, “Topical emails (such as, “Remote Best Practices” or “Successful Experiences by Fellow Instructors”, etc.)” Several requests were for information to be passed down within particular departments:

“[Have] messages passed down via faculty meetings (so having a designated person who is designated to get the updates and then share them with us)”

“Please work through program teams who can confirm what applies to their students and approach. Don’t leave it to instructors to decide what to use or not.”

Conclusions

On the whole, the instructors who responded to the survey were fairly familiar with the range of resources on remote teaching available and were making good use of them. That said, respondents also appeared to have a number of issues with their courses that required individual support – “email support/Zoom office hours” was the second most commonly used resource, and respondents selected the same as “most helpful” along with “peer support.” “Individualized support” was also the top theme that emerged among write-in comments when respondents were asked to name additional help or resources they would like to see. It may be that, for instructors, talking with an expert or peer about a problem provides an opportunity to be reassured they are on the right track – an opportunity missing from other types of resources.

The survey findings also suggest that instructors are looking for clear, practical advice on how to achieve particular goals, and they want to find this information efficiently. Respondents made heavy use of information hubs and Canvas resources, and among these, appreciated the model courses created by faculty, the readiness checklists and course templates. The write-in responses about additional resources suggest that instructors would like one central place where they can find all resources available to them. And as far as sharing new information, respondents prefer a trusted channel – Canvas banner, UW Insider, or a targeted email from division or department lead, or known expert in digital learning.

Finally, it’s clear from the survey that instructors want to find ways to engage students and keep them engaged in learning. Top among the challenges respondents reported was keeping students engaged during Zoom sessions, cultivating community among students, and getting good discussions going. Pleas for further help on the issue of engagement appeared in the write-in responses as well. Here, some comments about software and hardware were also tangentially related to issues of engagement, since instructors were seeking additional interactive tools or, in the case of one instructor, a larger monitor so he could view more of his students at one time. The issue of engagement appears to be especially urgent as we consider how best to support instructors with their remote teaching in the months ahead.