



Conversation Starters for New Online Academic Program Design: Undergraduate Programs Program Innovation Hub

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Context:

When planning a new online program, we need to consider multiple aspects of the program which may extend beyond the current templates. Designing and implementing high quality online academic programs involves essential aspects of overall program quality such as student support, the student experience, and scheduling. This document is intended to provide conversation starters for those who are designing new online or blended undergraduate programs.

Mode of delivery considerations:

- What mode of delivery makes the most sense for students and instructors?
 - Are the reasons for choosing a blended or online modality clear? What are the benefits for faculty and students?
- Have we clarified what constitutes “blended” versus “online” (i.e., if the whole program is offered online but there is a field-based practicum at the end, how is it classified?)
- How much of the program will be offered synchronously versus asynchronously? How will this impact students and instructors?
- Who are the anticipated students for the proposed program, and what are their needs in terms of program modality? How and at what stage are students (future/current) being consulted?
 - Do we want to attract students who live elsewhere than the city of Calgary or in other time zones? If so, what implications will this have for planning?
 - Are students in the online program allowed to select from full-time or part-time studies?

Resources and supports needed:

- What technological and human resources will be needed to support the online program, educators, and students?
- What institutional technology infrastructure and supports will be available to support the implementation of the student learning experiences (e.g. tools within the LMS, other novel/innovative learning technologies needed to support ‘signature’ learning experiences/pedagogies, EL/WIL, OERs)?
- What additional student and instructor supports are we able to provide at the faculty or department level, including outside of regular business hours? How will access to these supports be made available online?
- How will online students be able to access technical support, wellness support, learning support, and library services, including outside of regular business hours?
- What support and professional development is available to instructors who are reluctant or new to teach blended and online courses?
- Which institutional groups will we need to connect with regarding planning and implementation support?
- What administrative supports exist for a fully online program? Will we need to adapt or develop further administrative supports?

- What will implementing an online program cost? What are the one-time costs and what will be ongoing costs? Where will the money come from?

Curriculum design considerations:

- How will we provide quality online learning experiences? How will a variety in teaching and learning online activities be incorporated across the program?
 - How can we ensure high quality learning opportunities consistent with good practice in online program design and pedagogy?
 - Have we explored open pedagogy and open educational resources?
 - Are students in online sections/programs and those in face-to-face sections/programs receiving equitable experiences?
- What opportunities exist to engage online students outside of credit courses (co-curricular opportunities, Work-integrated Learning, exchanges, etc.)?
- How has academic integrity for online learning been included in curriculum design?
- Have we considered student learning experiences beyond content or planned instruction and assessment to include learning experiences both in and beyond the online classroom? What unique online learning experiences are offered in the program?
- To what extent does the new online program design consider broader policies such as student accessibility and accommodations?
- How will we schedule online exams and other timed assessments to ensure equity and fairness?
- Will we have synchronous sessions? If so, will they be outside of 'regular' class times? Who will be most impacted by the timing of these sessions?

Other programmatic considerations

- How will the online program foster a sense of belonging in the program and to the university?
- How are we engaging graduate students in online programs as Graduate Assistants (Teaching) and Graduate Assistants (Research)? Do they have the same opportunity as local students?
- What structures or modes of communication will be used to encourage students to engage online with the program as well as with each other?
- What will the admissions process be like for this online program? Will it be different from other programs in the department/faculty/ or the institution?
- How sustainable is the plan in terms of structural support, including technologies used in classrooms for blended courses and online learning technologies?
- How are we providing advisors with the training needed to support online students?

Glossary of Terms:

Academic integrity: “the foundation of the development and acquisition of knowledge and is based on values of honesty, trust, responsibility and respect” (University of Calgary, 2022a).

Asynchronous: means that a component is not scheduled at a specific time; therefore, students may engage with the course material at a time that is convenient for them (Office of the Registrar, 2022).

Blended: means that the program includes both in-person and online meetings (Office of the Registrar, 2022).

Equity: Equity is a principle, condition, process, and outcome rooted in human rights and the inviolability of human dignity. It is integral to the legal principle of justice, and the ethical principle and practice of fairness and doing the right thing. It requires identifying patterns of inequities and making changes to systems, cultures, and processes that obstruct members of the community from achieving their full potential.

Equity enables proactive measures and reasonable accommodation necessary to identify structural, systemic and cultural barriers; discrimination, unfairness, and disadvantage; and ensure equitable pathways and opportunity structures for women, Indigenous peoples, visible/racialized minorities, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S+ in all spheres of life (University of Calgary, 2022b).

Experiential Learning: Experiential learning (EL) is learning-by-doing that bridges knowledge and experience through critical reflection. EL activities are intentionally designed and assessed. As such, they empower learners to enhance individual and collaborative skills such as complex problem solving, professional practice skills, and teamwork. Reflecting critically on these activities helps individuals develop higher order thinking to challenge and advance their perspectives. The EL process prepares students to take on roles as active citizens and thrive in an increasingly complex world (Reid et al., 2020).

Hybrid: means that some meetings for a component will be delivered synchronously, and some meetings will be delivered asynchronously. It could also mean reduced class times during the week or alternating weeks (University of Calgary, 2022c).

Multiple pathways for entry:

Online:

Synchronous: means that a component is scheduled at specific times. Students must participate or engage at the scheduled time(s) (Office of the Registrar, 2022).

References:

- Reid, L., Stowe, L., Kenny, N., Barker, S., Johns, C., Christie, T., King, L., & Hillmo, J. (2020). *Experiential Learning Plan for the University of Calgary* (2020-25).
- University of Calgary. (2022a). *K.3 Statement on academic integrity*. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-3.html>
- University of Calgary. (2022b). *Importance of EDI language*. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion/literacy-and-education/glossary-terms>
- University of Calgary. (2022c). Registration definitions. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/definitions>

Resources:

Academic integrity:

- Student Success Centre, Academic Integrity: <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/learning/academic-integrity>
Indigenous Academic Integrity: <https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/resources/indigenous-academic-integrity>

Alberta Credential Framework:

- <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/alberta-credential-framework>

Course design:

- <https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/learning-and-instructional-design/course-design>

Experiential Learning:

- <https://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/teaching-learning/experiential-learning>

Full-time and part-time student status:

- Undergraduate: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-11.html>
Graduate: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/grad/current/gs-d-3.html>

Types of Credentials and Sub-degree Nomenclature

- <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/types-of-credentials-and-sub-degree-nomenclature.html>