

Guiding Principles for Choosing Courses that Could be Taught Online Post-Pandemic (revised June 2022)

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Introduction and Definition of Terms

Teaching courses online or in a blended format offers new diverse opportunities for teaching and learning, as well as new important challenges related to access, resources, and support. However, it is critical that decisions about which and how many courses in a program are taught online consider not just the individual courses but also the relative balance of courses taught in a variety of modalities within the programs' curriculum.

As of Fall 2022, the remote (REMT) code will no longer be available. Courses that will consist of virtual components will be coded using either **ONLN** (Online), **BLEN** (blended), or **HYFX** (hyflex).

An **ONLN** course/meet is offered fully online, mainly in an asynchronous format, but may have synchronous components that include designated meeting times. Any requirements for designated, scheduled meeting times will be indicated to students in the course notes, and where possible, in the brief course description. All instructional activities occur online. Course directors may also create additional opportunities for students to come to campus, but these opportunities cannot be mandatory for students to participate in. It is noted that students *may* be required to write in-person examinations for an online course (communication from the Registrar's Office, March 21, 2022); such courses will include an explanatory note in the course notes that reads, "*This course is delivered online but has an in-person exam.*" Other explanatory notes such as, "*This meet has synchronous sessions at the day/time indicated, as well as asynchronous sessions*" may also be submitted by the school or department. The intent is to accurately communicate the course format, as students will be required to decide at the time of registration whether they can complete the course based on their ability to sit the exam during the scheduled exam period.

A **BLEN** course/meet refers to the use of a combination of virtual, asynchronous with scheduled, in-person components (where the instructor will define whether virtual components are synchronous or asynchronous). Importantly, a blended format usually involves a restructuring of class contact hours "with the goal to enhance engagement and to extend access to internet-based learning opportunities" (Garrison, Vaughn, 2008). The [Common Language for eLearning](#) document describes blended learning at York as at least 30% of the course delivered face-to-face, 30% online and the remaining 40% either online or face-to-face. The online components of BLEN courses can be delivered in a synchronous or asynchronous format.

A **HYFX** course/meet is currently defined at York University as a mode of delivery that allows students to choose to engage in a course in person or synchronously online (e.g., via Zoom). Each class is offered in-person and synchronously online, with asynchronous online resources that provide flexible experiences and multiple modes of delivery (Elkhoury & Frake-Mistak, 2021).

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While York University continues to offer mainly in-person courses in most of its approved programs, and although remote course designations will no longer be used, there are lessons to be learned and influences and effects from online learning that will continue for course and curriculum delivery as the pandemic wanes. This document proposes a systematic multi-step approach that can be used as a **guiding framework for online course and curriculum development and for selecting online offerings**. The framework described by [Chen et al., \(2019\)](#), as the underlying principle, has been adapted to guide the decision making process. This proposed approach also considers how the course(s) could be integrated into the overall online teaching strategy and priorities for the department/school, Faculty, and York University as a whole.

Framework and Steps for Choosing the Delivery Format of Courses

Each step is presented alongside guiding questions for both *pedagogical* and *practical* implications.

- ❖ **Pedagogical considerations** include questions related to [designing a meaningful learning experience for students](#). These considerations often include questions of revisiting/revising course or program learning outcomes, encouraging student engagement in both synchronous and asynchronous environments, and selecting [alternative assessment strategies](#) and tools or platforms that are best suited for online teaching and the achievement of learning outcomes. These considerations may also refer to integrating principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to support students who may engage with material and demonstrate their learning in diverse ways.
- ❖ **Practical considerations** include questions related to the administrative, budgetary, and procedural implications of teaching online (e.g., course fees, faculty hires & support, and required resources). These considerations also include addressing issues of equity and access in offering courses online.

Step 1: Needs Assessment

This first step identifies the needs of students in the learning environment, and of the faculty and overall program that can be met by a change in delivery. Define the desirable outcome(s) that the course format (ONLN, BLEN, HYFX) will address and identify opportunities for how new online offerings, for instance, could influence the outcome(s). Consider the learners and assess their preferences and needs, including their feedback on experiences with previous online, blended or remote delivery.

Pedagogical Considerations: *Consider what skills are to be developed in this course and how can technology help. Can technology overcome existing barriers, bridge existing teaching and learning gaps, or enhance the learning experience?*

Thoughtful and appropriate use of technology and resources may dictate whether a course is more suitable for online or blended formats. For example, if the course can benefit from in-person use of equipment then it may be better suited to be adapted to blended rather than fully online delivery.

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When deciding on a delivery format it is important to consider the pedagogical design of the course to ensure that program learning outcomes will be met, and appropriate scaffolding of knowledge will take place.

Online learning offers greater flexibility and autonomy to learners. As a result, this may be desirable for commuters or part-time students, or those working full-time alongside their studies. However, online learning does require students to have attributes such as a level of comfort with use of technology and time management ([Joosten and Cusatis, 2020](#)). Therefore, one aspect that may need to be considered is the learners' perceived readiness and preparedness when choosing or creating a course to be delivered fully online. Keep in mind that while there are no hard and fast rules, there are benefits of having 1000 and 4000 level in-person and face-to-face courses. In particular, first-year students transitioning into York may benefit from on-campus support and fourth-year students that require references may prefer the in-person interaction with their course directors.

Another factor to consider is the type of support students might benefit from in each course. While courses that tend to have a higher completion average may be better suited for online delivery, it is possible to leverage technology to better support students in courses with lower completion rates by utilizing reusable online learning objects such as high-quality simulations, virtual laboratories, H5P interactive videos, and formative check-your-knowledge quizzes.

Finally, class size is another aspect that can impact the online learning experience as it can influence the quality of interaction between instructors and students in each course, therefore class size in online courses is typically restricted by the ability of the instructor to work with students. Many factors, including course design, type of course (e.g., lower level vs. advanced), instructors' comfort level with online teaching and the learning outcomes of the course, need to be considered when determining an optimal enrolment size for an online course. For example, large enrollment numbers in courses designed from a constructivist perspective that aligns learning outcomes with appropriate teaching activities and assessment strategies can increase the cognitive load for learners and the instructor. This may be due to several factors, including the tendency to integrate multiple teaching activities to offer a scaffolded approach where students have several opportunities to demonstrate their learning and receive critical feedback. However, if automated feedback is implemented or cooperative learning strategies are used then higher enrollment numbers may be possible ([Burch, Quality Matters 2019](#)).

While many factors are discussed, there are other considerations that may be important but may not be addressed in this document. As such, the following guiding questions are intended to help identify other important parameters that may need to be considered in a needs assessment.

Will students be ready and well-prepared to learn in an online environment?

- Does the curriculum content and course design lend itself to student success in the subject if content and learning activities are online?
- What expectations might students have or what experiences do they have about learning online?
- What expectations about online learning have been communicated to them?

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- How will students be expected to communicate with the instructor, both during class times and for questions/concerns throughout the course?
- Some students may be new to university and online learning, while others may be new to a synchronous, asynchronous, or a mixture of the two learning environments. Consider both learning needs/styles of students at different levels and different expectations or experiences, as well as students' previous experiences and current familiarity with online learning.
- How might students with disabilities, different learning styles, and/or different living and learning circumstances be best able to navigate the course? The pivot to more flexible teaching and course delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a greater awareness on the challenges associated with online delivery. Interested about learning more? Please see the brief report on [COVID-19 Impacts on Student Learning and Equity](#).

Practical Considerations: *What costs might be incurred by students and/or the school/department in offering online courses? Will online courses increase or decrease the number of available seats in the courses and/or program?*

The costs associated with developing an online course can be greater than those for a blended or face-to-face course. To maximize existing resources, rigorous and thoughtful development of online curricula is necessary. Therefore, the decision on the number of courses that can be delivered online can involve balancing the needs identified and the availability of resources and time for supporting this change.

One must also consider the impact of online offerings on the eligibility of international students for student VISA. For more information, please visit [York International](#).

If an existing course is being considered for adaptation to online delivery, consider what term and what time the course is being offered currently. While this may not apply to all students, typically students taking courses in the evening or in the summertime tend to be more interested in online learning opportunities.

Will the course be open to distance learners? If yes, there are many factors and implications that need to be considered. For example, if in-person examination is necessary for the course then other methods of in-person proctoring must be implemented and supported. Furthermore, when developing courses open to students beyond the Canadian borders, one must be cautious with resources used as there may be restricted access to content posted outside of eClass in some countries. Media content on YouTube can be limited by geographic regions and some countries may have internet censorship that may limit access and affect the students' ability to progress through the curriculum.

Step 2: Program Goals and Priorities

This second step involves a review of how the course and program will be affected by the change to delivery. Goals provide direction but require setting priorities and using appropriate resources to achieve those desired outcomes. Consider how the change in modality could impact the

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school/departmental priorities as well as the ability of students to achieve the intended program learning outcomes.

Pedagogical Considerations: *How might the online or blended environment impact how (or if) course learning outcomes, program learning outcomes, and/or teaching objectives can be successfully achieved?*

Consider the course learning outcomes and teaching objectives when assessing whether a course can be delivered effectively online. Blended delivery uses a delivery format that combines virtual with scheduled, in-person meets. This delivery modality may be more appropriate for some courses as it provides an opportunity to integrate practice and feedback during an in-person session, which can be better suited for developing psychomotor skills and higher-order outcomes in communication and procedural skills.

At times, temporary changes to the delivery of a course may be needed to achieve teaching objectives. Situations such as a lack of available, appropriate classroom space, or an instructor's need and request for accommodation, are factors to be considered when determining such changes to course delivery formats.

Practical Considerations: *Will changes that are made be significant enough that they will result in modifications to the program's curricula and as such, will require additional review or approval?*

It is important to know that making significant changes to an approved program is considered a major modification and will require approval by the institutional governance process. This includes changing the existing delivery of a program from face-to-face to fully online or making major changes to a significant portion of courses in a program (more than one third of courses). For more information, please see page 17 of [York University Quality Assurance Procedures \(YUQAP\)](#). Based on the existing Quality Assurance Framework, the Director, Academic Programs and Policy (Office of VP Academic) has indicated that *introducing additional ONLN sections to existing face-to-face offerings for a significant portion of courses in a program may also be considered a major modification and will require approval through the normal curricular approval process.* If a significant portion (more than a third) of the program's courses are to be offered online, it's important to ensure that support services (e.g., online counseling, online student advising and other academic supports, technology support) for students are offered online as well.

Usually, *changes made to the mode of delivery of a course would be addressed through a **minor modification at the unit and Faculty level*** and would require approval of the change by the Faculty Curriculum Committee and Faculty Council. The rationale for changing the delivery of only one or two sections of a multiple section course would need to be carefully considered. Temporary changes for the purposes of piloting alternate course formats would also require thoughtful rationale. Any outcomes of a pilot should be documented using appropriate forms, to decide if changes should be made permanent, which may necessitate further formal approval processes.

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If an existing course or set of courses (e.g., all prerequisite first year courses) were being revised and adapted to online delivery, consider whether the change would impact other courses, or if it would result in more than a third of the related program's courses delivered online (in which case the overall program outcomes may be affected). Ensure that with changes to the online delivery modality, the course will be able to maintain alignment to program learning outcomes and that appropriate scaffolding from introductory to mastery of outcomes will still be achieved.

Step 3: Implementation and Delivery

This step involves enacting the identified changes. Identify and select appropriate and feasible pedagogical methods and instructional content for course delivery. At this stage, it is important to consider how both students and faculty can be supported in navigating each course as well as the overall program structure, learning management platform(s) such as eClass, and degree requirements.

Pedagogical Considerations: *What online tools and/or platforms will be used to help students engage with the course content, with the instructor, and with each other?*

Online courses are not meant to be a repository for information but are thoughtfully designed and delivered instructional activities and evaluation methods. High quality online courses provide an online learning environment and instructional content that engages the learners and can include reusable online learning objects and activities such as high-quality simulations, virtual laboratories, H5P interactive videos, and formative check-your-knowledge quizzes. All instructional content is AODA compliant to ensure access by all students. This includes web-based platforms and software, which must meet the accessibility standards as identified by the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - WCAG 2.0](#). Finally, if reusing existing content, then principles of copyright and fair use are applied.

Practical Considerations: *What resources and supports will be required to (re)design and develop online courses? Will there be opportunities for upfront training and consulting as these courses are redesigned and piloted? Will students need support services or resources to be successful online learners?*

The challenges associated with implementing a substantial online curriculum are sometimes overlooked. It may be necessary to initially consider a pilot program with a select number of courses prior to making major changes to the curriculum. Consider the level of support that can be acquired through existing resources and available services. Upfront time for instructional content creation and curriculum design is of utmost importance. Faculty training and professional development should also be considered.

What additional resources and/or support might **students** need to access and navigate online courses?

- Will all students have access to the technology and Internet bandwidth required to engage in the course? What might this mean for how learning activities are designed, and where course materials are shared?

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- Are there materials or supplies (e.g., lab materials) that students will need access to when not on campus? Will there be a cost to students in obtaining these materials or supplies?

What additional resources and/or support might **instructors** need to (re)design and/or teach online or in a blended format?

- Do faculty require professional development training for online delivery? Have they previously accessed or taught with the platform(s) they will be using? (e.g., Zoom, eClass, etc.) Do they feel comfortable navigating the available features of the platform?
- Will instructors require additional resources or support to grade student work (e.g., TA support) because they attracted a higher number of students?
- Will there be an opportunity for instructors to connect and share their best practices and/or to benefit from opportunities for professional development internally and/or externally?

Step 4: Evaluation and Feedback

The final step is to evaluate whether the curriculum change was successful and how it can be further improved.

Pedagogical Considerations: *How might assessment strategies need to be revised based on the online tools that students will use to demonstrate their learning? What tools might be needed or explored to provide students with meaningful, timely feedback?*

An early or immediate way to evaluate whether a course change was successful is to explore student feedback and experiences. If a course is traditionally offered in person, but then is to be offered online or in a blended or hyflex format, consider how to collect feedback from students. Information on not only their overall satisfaction with the course, but also how this new format of delivery impacted how they learned, how learning objectives were achieved, how course materials and resources were navigated, and how (or if) they felt connected to their instructor and classroom community, would be important indicators to consider. Past evaluations of remote experiences may also inform how students may experience online, blended or hyflex delivery, and course planning and design of assessment and evaluation tools.

Ensuring that there is [constructive alignment](#) between course learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment strategies will also contribute to the overall success of a curriculum change. Constructive alignment in each course will help build toward a well-defined link between the program's courses and the overall program learning outcomes (PLOs) that represent the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all students will achieve upon graduation.

This stage can be considered part of the process of 'closing the loop' after reviewing the program goals and priorities at an earlier stage of this process. Confirm any assumptions as to whether these goals and associated learning outcomes were indeed possible for students to achieve (or work toward achieving) in the online environment. This may inform future informal or formal curriculum review processes as the program, and its course offerings, continue to evolve.

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Practical Considerations: *What other professional bodies, internal (York) processes, and/or other quality assurance frameworks must be followed when making changes to the program and course offerings? How might an instructor take advantage of quality assurance resources when evaluating updated course and program offerings?*

Several organizations, institutions, and consortiums have created resources (e.g., checklist, rubrics, etc.) to enhance the quality of online learning in higher education by establishing quality standards for online courses. One or more of these evaluation tools can be used during the development and early phase of implementation to ensure high quality online course delivery is achieved.

- [Quality Learning & Teaching Evaluation Rubric](#) (QLT Rubric) by CSU is an evaluation instrument for assessing the quality of online and blended courses but can be used as a developmental process for online course design and redesign.
- The [Online Learning Consortium \(OLC\)](#) offers a suite of scoreboards for improving the quality and accessibility of online courses. These Quality Scorecards cover six main areas:
 - [Online Student Support](#) to evaluate institutional support and services for online learners
 - [Administration of Online Programs](#) for programs to evaluate their online learning against benchmarks and standards
 - [Blended Learning Programs](#) can be used as a tool by faculty, instructional designers, and administrators to evaluate blended learning programs
 - [Course Design Review](#) for reviewing and improving instructional design and accessibility of online courses
 - [Quality Course Teaching and Instructional Practice](#) for review and validation of instructional practices
 - [Digital Courseware Instructional Practice](#) for building an effective online learning environment
- [Rubric for Online Instruction \(ROI\)](#) developed by CSU Chico can be used as an evaluation tool or development process for designing a new course for the online environment.
- [QM Course Design Rubric Standards](#) developed by Quality Matters (QM) were created for assessing quality and help faculty and course developers incorporate best practices in their online or blended course design. Through a peer-review process courses can attain a QM certification if the quality expectations are met at or above 85% level.
- [Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric](#) developed by Blackboard recognizes best practices in four major areas: Course Design, Interaction & Collaboration, Assessment, and Learner Support
- Illinois Online Network's [Quality Online Course Initiative](#) (QOCI) rubric and checklist can serve as a tool to assist in the design or redesign of online courses, as well as an evaluation tool for online courses.

*Does the school/department have a **curriculum evaluation plan** in place for its program(s)?*

It is important to have a curriculum evaluation plan in place to support the ongoing collection and analysis of data related to curriculum and program delivery for continuous improvement of curriculum. Monitoring curricular changes can be accomplished using an [action plan](#). The following guiding

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questions are intended to help identify important parameters that may need to be considered in the evaluation process:

- *Have students achieved the intended course and program learning outcomes? What evidence was collected that demonstrates students' successful achievement of these outcomes?*
- *Do students appreciate or value their learning experience? Did the changes made to delivery modalities of courses enhance student satisfaction, or student success in the course or the program overall?*
- *How do stakeholders perceive the changes made to the curriculum?*
 - *Are stakeholders engaged? e.g., students, alumni, teaching assistants, teaching faculty (CDs, CCDs), community partners, employer, Faculty/Department/School, etc.*
- *What evidence is being collected to assess the effectiveness of these changes? Are both direct and indirect measures of gathering evidence considered?*
 - *Direct evaluations: embedded course-based assessments, program assessments (ePortfolio), performance on standardized tests, practicum supervisors/preceptors, etc.*
 - *Indirect evaluations: program trends (enrollment numbers, DFW rates, retention rates, etc.), student surveys, etc.*
- *Do the existing faculty professional development opportunities support the program needs?*

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many factors that need to be considered when choosing courses for online delivery. Maybe the most pragmatic way to approach the selection criteria is first to consider a pilot program with initial courses selected based on their feasibility, potential for enhancing student success, and other factors discussed in this document.

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