Recommendations from the Ad-Hoc Committee on Online Teaching Excellence  
(Submitted May 15, 2020)

Purpose and Scope

In April 2020, Provost Debbie Prentice constituted an ad-hoc Committee on Online Teaching Excellence to address ways to make online instruction more engaging, dynamic, and interactive. This was part of the University’s contingency planning process and is one of several committees charged to look at different options for the University in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee met seven times between April 23 and May 14. We discussed the support and guidance students and faculty will need, new and emergent technologies, and course staffing models, among other topics.

Committee Members

- Jay Dominick, Ph.D., Vice President for Information Technology and CIO (co-chair of the committee)
- Katherine (Kate) Stanton, Ph.D., Associate Dean and Director of the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning (co-chair of the committee)
- Sigrid M. Adriaenssens, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Director of Mechanics, Materials and Structures Program
- Oliver D. Avens, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
- Patrick W. Caddeau, Ph.D., Dean of Forbes College
- Elizabeth L. Colagiuri, M.P.A., Deputy Dean of the College
- Cole M. Crittenden, Ph.D., Deputy Dean of the Graduate School
- Asif A. Ghazanfar, Ph.D., Professor of Neuroscience & Psychology; Director of Undergraduate Studies
- Meredith Martin, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English; Director of the Center for Digital Humanities
- Maria A. Medvedeva, Ph.D., Director of Studies, Rockefeller College
- James C. Sturm, Ph.D., Professor of Electrical Engineering; Director of Undergraduate Studies
- Janet Vertesi, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Sociology
- Stacy E. Wolf, Ph.D., Professor of Theater; Director, Program in Music Theater

Introduction

Online excellence requires more than “high tech” or glitzy online instruction. It requires that we maintain the academic, cultural, and social elements that make a liberal arts education at Princeton so extraordinary. These elements include a commitment to rigor, robust faculty-student and student-student interaction, and integrity, as well as creativity, engagement, and a sense of
purpose. Our intellectual work is a source of strength for our community, infused with reflection, exploration, and joy.

A Princeton education offers a sense of connection, community, and intimacy, especially in small seminars and independent work. We excel at teaching critical thinking, supporting our students with empathy and compassion, and embracing diversity and inclusion. We expect students will be transformed by their time at Princeton.

These commitments may seem difficult to achieve in the online sphere, but we believe we can do so by listening to our students, faculty, and staff and incorporating best practices in online education and remote collaboration, allowing us to build the sociotechnical experiences needed to uphold our offline commitments.

**Feedback from Students and Faculty**

As we began our work, the committee reviewed undergraduate student survey responses regarding the Virtual Instruction Period (VIP) to gain a sense of the student experience in spring 2020. We learned that students who experience regular engagement directly with individual faculty (via email and Zoom) convey a much more positive assessment of virtual instruction.

Variety of instructional formats, clarity of guidelines, and emotional comfort seem to be critical components for maintaining student engagement during virtual instruction. For example, students respond positively to lectures that have been converted to “podcasts” and to class formats that allow for conversation in small groups. They are more likely to report a lack of engagement with Power Point-driven lectures or postings to large discussion boards.

Students report that developing friendships through collaboration on a project, being able to casually ask a question, and doing something “fun” have been essential to maintaining motivation and engagement over time. Overall, students seem most concerned by the potential loss of community that virtual instruction represents. For virtual instruction to succeed, students will need reassurance that it will be delivered in a way that challenges them intellectually but also sustains their engagement and motivation.

We gathered as much information as possible from our own faculty and from colleagues at other institutions. Our main sources for faculty input have been three open-ended questions shared on the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning website on May 6 (a full survey was sent to all faculty on May 8; results will be collated shortly). The committee received numerous emails and written input from several departments. We also relied on our own experience of teaching online.

Unsurprisingly, faculty care deeply about the quality of instruction they provide. As for our students, physical and mental health is a priority, and faculty are anxious about their ability to excel in an online environment that is new to them. Those with small children are concerned about schools remaining closed in the fall and worry about how to teach and conduct research while also home-schooling. Moreover, those who teach in labs and studios are concerned about replicating collaborative, haptic, and equipment- or space-dependent learning (and doing so in a safe manner for students). In many cases it is not possible to replicate hand-on labs on-line in any obvious
Faculty desire clear guidelines and support but also expect the University to act with compassion and deep humanity.

With this information in mind, the committee prepared the recommendations that follow. They focus on undergraduate education but are relevant to teaching and mentoring graduate students as well. Our recommendations seek to leverage the right tools, services, and connection points to provide guidance and structure yet also flexibility.

We recognize the need to build community and continuity in the face of geographical and temporal displacement—and, in fact, are eager to explore new possibilities for collaboration across space and time. Individual departments and programs are already discussing solutions and sharing resources, and we see increased interest in conversations about inter-disciplinary pedagogy far beyond the current moment.

In this document, then, we offer innovative opportunities for meaningful engagement in our communities and in the current global crisis through a “Princeton Challenge,” templates that leverage best practices and supported technologies for standard class formats, cross-cutting ways to communicate experiences and expertise among our instructional community, and continued commitment to small classes and faculty-student interaction, while also addressing issues of instructional equity and equity of access.

We outline steps that departments and instructors can take to transition their course offerings to online instruction and elucidate the necessary steps to support these initiatives at the department and university level.

We also acknowledge fundamental questions that still need to be resolved. One is the question of childcare. As one faculty respondent wrote, “I desperately need safe and reliable childcare. I need schools to reopen. Everything else is absolutely secondary.” None of our recommendations for enhancing virtual teaching make sense without addressing the lack of childcare. Second, how do we “virtualize” experiential courses like labs and studios that typically rely on hands-on learning and/or hands on use of special equipment? Answering these two questions exceeded the charge of this committee, but we make several suggestions in response to them at the end of our report.

**Departmental Preparation**

Departments have distinctive curricular and pedagogical commitments and traditions. For this reason, we recommend that the planning process for virtual teaching and learning begin at the department level. Many of our recommendations will require complex and difficult decisions about what is taught and by whom. These decisions will involve discussion within the department and between the department and the University. To use the limited time available most effectively, we recommend that department chairs convene faculty working groups or appoint a department “point person” to coordinate planning efforts—for undergraduate instruction, that should be the Director of Undergraduate Studies. We are keenly aware that normal summer patterns will be disrupted, but departmental planning efforts should be a top priority.
We urge departments to recognize that our students’ lives are undergoing major disruption, and that special efforts are needed to keep them engaged and on track academically. We also urge departments to recognize the strains our faculty, especially faculty with caregiving responsibilities, are experiencing. In the spirit of these recognitions, we offer the following recommendations for departments:

1. **Examine and adjust course offerings.**

   Transitioning to a virtual fall will require departments and faculty to re-assess their teaching and research plans. Faculty expressed considerable concern that the courses they had planned to offer this fall would not transition well to a virtual environment. They asked, “At what point can we add new course offerings as substitutes?” And they asked, “How much flexibility will I be given to redesign my fall course?”

   Departments will need to make changes to course offerings within the context of their curriculum and the curricula of related departments. Making these changes will require the Registrar to open a new add-drop or course enrollment period over the summer. (The University may also want to consider shortening the traditional “shopping” period at the beginning of the semester, to minimize further disruptions.) Departments may choose to offer a smaller selection of lecture courses, with more faculty and graduate students involved in teaching the precepts for those courses that do go forward.

2. **Allow faculty, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty, to exercise flexibility with their leave schedules.**

   We noted that some faculty are not able or willing to teach or to learn new tools; others had planned on sabbaticals and their visiting scholar offers are no longer feasible. Still others will be caregiving and cannot teach with the same intensity that they had planned. Certain classes need more attention to transition well (i.e., labs and studios, discussed below). We also urge the Dean of the Faculty to develop clear guidance on COVID-related benefits or relief for faculty that matches the level of detail provided to HR employees.

3. **Commit to equitable distribution of teaching.**

   We are concerned that tenure-track faculty and graduate students who are “tech savvy” may be asked to shoulder a disproportionate burden in helping faculty make the transition to online teaching. In response, we urge departments to mitigate this risk by, for instance, creating a University-wide mentorship scheme for scholars with similar teaching requirements; setting up junior/senior mentorship pairs in their department; or establishing a voluntary departmental taskforce on online teaching that can disseminate best practices.

4. **Allow faculty to propose a “Princeton challenge”: A credit-bearing, research-intensive, project-focused and/or community-engaged experience focused on COVID-19 or as well as other community-focused problems.**

   We suggest introducing a research-forward, community-engaged possibility for faculty, students, and graduate students that uses a learn-by-doing, project-focused approach popular in open source communities. These opportunities would have the added benefit of building
community and commitment to shared goals, while taking advantage of the opportunities that digital tools offer and working asynchronously to accommodate variations in time zones, geographical location, and technological access.

Leveraging the expertise of ProCES and the Pace Center, and coordinated by use of a centralized platform, these courses would truly allow our university community to act in the midst of global crisis “in the service of all nations.” The benefit of project-based education is that the specific projects can be tailored to the circumstances of individual students—each individual student can be pushed to do better/deeper work in a way that takes into account their background knowledge, skills, interests, and the other responsibilities they’re facing.”

5. Enhance faculty-student interaction by:

a. Limiting precept size to between six and nine students.

A pervasive theme through our discussions, reinforced by comments in the student survey and in faculty comments, was that smaller section sizes led to better engagement. Based on available literature, we assert that the best number of students in a class taught synchronously or in a precept should be between six and nine.

Small groups are more likely to foster more engagement between students themselves as well as between faculty and students. As group size extends beyond nine, additional “helps”—such as break out rooms, moderators, and more structured conversation—should be implemented. Beyond a dozen participants, conversation becomes less spontaneous, chat rooms become necessary, and moderation becomes more important. The committee recognizes that circumstances will not always be conducive to such small sections, but strongly recommends that “smaller is better.”

b. Allowing faculty to precept for one another for teaching credit.

c. Encouraging tenure-track faculty to team-teach (this may be especially useful for new topical, interdisciplinary courses).

d. Allowing credit-bearing “tutorial”-style courses with two to three enrolled students to receive teaching credit.

Allowing faculty to precept for one another, encouraging faculty to team-teach, or teach small tutorial style courses for credit will increase faculty-student interaction. The first two options will also increase intellectual community among faculty.

e. Holding regular department office hours, staffed by faculty and/or department staff to check in with one another and with their students.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of interaction. Assistants in Instruction (AIs) noted that student attendance suffered toward the end of term, but conversely, this made it easier to teach class online since there were fewer students. Undergraduates mentioned again and again that “interaction was higher when we were in class” and that smaller precepts made interaction easier.
6. **Review teaching budgets with the DOF and request additional AI hours or teaching support (which might include hiring postdoctoral fellows, graduate students in ET/DCC status, or lecturers), allowing for the reduction of precept size or increased instructional support.**

7. **Encourage faculty, in consultation with the Registrar, to adjust their course meeting pattern if possible (i.e., for upper-level courses). Faculty might choose to meet twice a week for 80 minutes rather than once for three hours or hold two hours of class and one hour of asynchronous learning.**

Faculty respondents noted that teaching shorter, smaller courses online allowed for greater responsiveness and participation. One faculty member commented, “While my graduate students have done well with the three-hour seminar format online, I worry that undergraduates won’t. It’s also not healthy for any of us to be staring at postage-stamp-sized faces for that long; the Zoom headache is real.” Undergraduate survey responses support this, with a high correlation among student engagement, shorter class periods, and smaller class sizes.

8. **Engage students in planning efforts.**

Student respondents indicated they very much appreciated the work that faculty did to take courses online. They also have direct experience with what worked and what didn’t work. For concentrators and certificate students, engagement with the department itself is an important part of their educational experience.

9. **Use department or central funds purposefully to support instruction—for instance, to pay students to help faculty prepare for virtual teaching.**

10. **Actively engage with the McGraw Center and the instructional task force we call for below to collaborate on preparing for virtual teaching and learning.**

Below we make recommendations for the resources that the McGraw Center and the instructional task force develop.

**Instructional Resources**

We recognized an unprecedented need for support for online instruction. Those needs varied from the basic “how to” tutorials for tools like Zoom all the way through to the more complex “how should” questions that involve redesigning a course entirely. We heard a clear call for simple, standardized approaches to instruction that could be quickly adopted to help build community, increase engagement, provide effective assessment, and reduce complexity for faculty, while also maintaining academic rigor and excellence.

The McGraw Center was often cited as being important to the successful move to online and as a critical resource for the fall, but McGraw cannot support an entire campus without help. Bringing all of the University’s instructional support resources to bear in a coordinated manner will be essential.
We therefore recommend that the University immediately form an Instructional Task Force, led by the McGraw Center and including all relevant resources, such as the Office of Informational Technology, the Council on Science and Technology, the Center for Digital Humanities, the Art Museum, and the Library. The task force might be named the “Advisory Board for Distance Learning Excellence,” or ABLE. It should respond to the need for guidance that our faculty expressed, and minimize the divergence in course technologies, techniques, and expectations that made for a fractured experience for students.

We also recommend that the University carefully review McGraw’s and OIT’s staffing levels, as the work of coordinating the task force’s efforts will fall most heavily on their units.

We recommend that the Instructional Task Force:

1. Develop five or six course templates, ready-made to serve different class types (for example, seminar, lecture, lab) as well as curricular and pedagogical goals. This work should be done in consultation with faculty members.

Our students noted that faculty made the transition to virtual teaching “unevenly” and had varying levels of technical agility. Course templates would include certain pre-selected technologies and course arrangements to address common needs and requirements and would provide a starting point from which faculty could customize their class. They would also offer a mix of synchronous and asynchronous participation options for students and faculty whose internet connections are fragile.

2. Send McGraw staff or a related expert to give an overview of the relevant templates at individual department faculty meetings; have a trained consultant available to work one-on-one with faculty to implement their specific courses as a follow-up.

3. Create dedicated working groups, with staff support, to develop guidance for hard-to-virtualize course types.

We also recognize the critical importance of addressing independent research in the arts, lab sciences, and studio departments, which is beyond the scope of this committee.

4. Develop resources for faculty and for graduate student AIs on how to build community, recognize student distress, and make appropriate referrals.

We recognize the crucial importance of building community within our classrooms, and the challenge of doing so if we begin a semester remotely. One faculty respondent noted, “It will be harder to get to know students, gain their trust, and identify issues (in learning/engaging with the material but also potential home issues that educators are often on the front lines of identifying). How can we break this barrier virtually without being overly invasive? Similarly, as noted, students engaging with each other in and outside of class is one of the most rewarding aspects of college life.”

5. Develop workshops and short guides for faculty and graduate student AIs on how to use the interactive tools of Zoom.
Many faculty respondents indicated interest in tutorials on how to use the existing features of Zoom. Learning how to integrate a blackboard/whiteboard feature (or other interactive tools) was a recurring request. Because faculty have relied on graduate student AIs to help them convert their courses to an online format, and because some undergraduate courses are led entirely by graduate student AIs (language courses, for example), offering similar workshops and guides to graduate students will be crucial.

6. **Develop a set of workshops that allow faculty and graduate student AIs to learn and experiment with digital tools.**

For faculty who are more conversant with Zoom and LMS platforms, we recommend that the Instructional Task Force commit to summer consultations, workshops, and webinars for faculty and graduate students to learn about and experiment with digital tools. Faculty need orientation in what is possible and need hands-on, interactive instruction themselves to gain fluency in these tools.

Graduate student AIs found Slack to be a useful supplement to discussion, for instance, and were able to quickly answer questions outside of email on course-specific Slack channels, but they were never properly oriented in the software. Discipline-specific digital tools and resources abound. We should consider division-specific, skill-specific (annotation, close-reading, pair-programming), or even class-size specific workshops in digital tools.

7. **Develop a set of workshops that teach faculty and students to record and edit video for student performances and projects.**

Faculty across the University who include performance assignments in their classes, including (but not limited to) the Lewis Center for the Arts and the Department of Music, expressed a need and desire to learn how to record and edit video. These tools will be key to enabling performance-based assignments and to sustaining a vibrant performance culture at Princeton. Workshops led by experts at McGraw and course assistant support—perhaps with recent graduates—can fill this need.

8. **Create a “digital toolbox” that allows faculty to identify and select digital tools by pedagogical need.**

Faculty new to the digital teaching environment have been overwhelmed by the amount of information available. Several faculty desired direction, in other words, a “which problem, which tool” approach to online teaching. The McGraw Center has piloted a “digital toolkit,” which, if supplemented by instructional technology support, webinars, and/or workshops, will provide a curated list of options that faculty will be able to sort and test on their own time.

9. **Host regular faculty and graduate student AI “meetups” to discuss best practices.**

Princeton’s commitment to online teaching excellence comes back to community again and again: how to create engagement and community in the classroom, how to leverage our compassion for our own community’s particular needs in this historic moment, how to reach across divisions and departments to share resources and best practices in regular meet-ups.
Successful ideas would be searchable and available in the repository. We imagine an open, ongoing pedagogy “workshop” format, where in-person or online, faculty and AIs can troubleshoot, ask basic or complex questions, and feel that we are in this experimental endeavor together.

10. Prepare a plan for improving technological support for instruction.

Our traditional methods for delivering instruction do not require much in the way of technology support. On the rare occasions when support was needed it was often delivered by a person in a one-on-one setting. In the online instructional world, where instruction is 100% dependent on technology, support must be delivered remotely and often with quick turn-around.

In the survey responses from students as well as faculty, technology problems (from faculty who were not proficient in Zoom, to lack of computers, to spotty wireless connections) were cited as barriers to instruction.

Course Design Recommendations

Drawing on the committee’s discussions and our knowledge of the literature on teaching and learning and remote collaboration, we recommend that faculty keep these principles in mind when designing courses:

1. **Design courses in several distinct modules or segments.**

   Rather than one arc across the semester, a course might take the shape of three smaller arcs, each of which culminates in an assignment. This structure would allow faculty to pivot more easily from online to residential teaching, should the need arise. It might also allow a substitute faculty member to assume teaching responsibilities more easily in an emergency. Additionally, this approach would serve well those faculty who are also teaching graduate courses, which may be in-person but may have graduate students or even faculty instructors who must participate remotely because of health concerns.

2. **Design interactive elements into courses, drawing on a menu of choices in the above-mentioned course templates.**

   These interactive elements may also be conducted off-line. We can imagine students annotating a poem or analyzing experimental results independently before rejoining a class meeting.

3. **Select technology based on pedagogical need.**

   As one faculty member observed, “I’ve noticed that lots of discussions about Zoom teaching get derailed by technical questions; these conversations should stay focused on pedagogy.” As we note above, the McGraw Center has created a beta version of a digital toolkit that allows faculty to choose digital tools based on pedagogical purpose, but the technology is not invisible, nor should it be.
Our aim is to create technological fluency but to also allow professors and students to acknowledge that our use of technology in this moment provides its own teaching tool. Admitting, as professors, that we, too, are human, and the fact that we, too, are learning online also has pedagogical purpose.

4. **Consider “flipping” courses by prerecording lectures.**

Flipped courses have been around for 10+ years. They offer robust ways for students to pace their learning and interact with faculty and peers. In uncertain times, they allow faculty, AIs and students to time-shift instructional hours to manage care-taking commitments.

For departments with only a few lecture courses, we recommend that faculty record live lectures to make them available to students in different time zones. The recorded lecture should count towards the weekly instructional time; the in-person time may be reduced accordingly but be used in a more interactive fashion.

5. **Minimize the risks of academic dishonesty through assessment design.**

We affirm the core value of academic integrity to this institution. We encourage the use of carefully designed assessments (including the use of timed exams) to mitigate the risks of academic dishonesty in an online environment. Guidance on how to do this can be part of course templates (see above).

6. **Share best practices within and across departments (via Canvas, discussion boards, repository Slack channels, department meetings, etc.).**

The faculty survey, the past two weeks of meetings with the Office of the Dean of the College staff and Directors of Undergraduate Studies by division, as well as recent Chairs & Directors meetings reveal that every department is already thinking through the ramifications of online teaching. While many challenges and opportunities are unique, others crop up across the board: The need for small(er) precepts and seminars; the desire for interactivity and spontaneity; the eagerness to create community.

We suggest (as one chair recommended) establishing an easily accessible, on-going clearinghouse/archive of ideas, programs, and practices so that departments can benefit from the wisdom, experience, and creativity of other departments and programs. Outcomes from the discussions we suggest throughout this document would be accessible here. We propose an organized, searchable resource of ideas and solutions to Princeton’s pandemic pedagogy, potentially deploying our own LMS.

7. **Implement community-building practices into courses at the start of the semester: for instance, peer-mentorship, research, or evaluation, threaded forum discussions, etc.**

Online participatory groups from Wikipedia to open source communities build a sense of community in their network despite never meeting face-to-face. Techniques include working collectively toward a common cause, using a relatively flat organization including peer mentorship,
being clear about expected contributions and division of work, and arranging smaller scale meetups or group meetings. Icebreakers are also developed for virtual teams.

As many students and faculty were especially concerned about trust-building, interaction, and engagement, we recommend that courses borrow some of these techniques from online communities and collaborative workplaces in their design and development. We will distribute these ideas and resources as part of the course templates and tools available for faculty to use.

8. Consult with Instructional Task Force consultants or instructional designers on creating the course to optimize learning outcomes, pre-record lectures professionally, understand instructional tools, and implement assessments tools to gauge student understanding on the go.

**General Recommendations**

The move to online instruction poses a significant challenge to all aspects of the University. Our ability to react quickly and flexibly in moving our teaching online will require us to adapt many current administrative policies to the new reality. For this reason, we recommend that the University and its offices:

1. **Create a task force to study child-care needs and resources.**

   Caregiving commitments are unevenly distributed among our faculty and students, often reflecting existing gender and socioeconomic inequities. Failure to address caregiving not only impacts our ability to instruct online with excellence; it runs the risk of compounding several inequalities that Princeton works hard to address. What creative thinking can the University engage in to support faculty and graduate students whose children’s daycares or schools do not reopen? Can the University offer compassionate teaching relief to those faculty members? Can the University reduce the teaching duties of faculty with school-age children during the pandemic?

   Can we prioritize AI support (as in a teaching assistant, not an additional preceptor) for faculty with caregiving duties? Can we embrace team-teaching? Can we allow faculty to use their childcare funding for conference travel for in-home care? Can we rethink committee or advising roles for those who are caring for others? Can we provide teaching relief in a future semester for faculty who are unable to conduct research due to caregiving responsibilities? These questions are beyond the scope of our charge, yet fundamental to how we proceed.

2. **Create a transparent and simple process by which departments can request centralized resources.**

   We recommend that departments be given explicit guidance and firm dates for making these requests, and as soon as possible, to accelerate their planning process.

3. **Consider how to award money to faculty for course redesign or innovation.**

   On the faculty questionnaire, respondents noted the additional preparation and work the fall semester will require. The committee debated the best mechanism for compensating faculty for this work. Our ideas include awarding all teaching faculty summer stipends; creating a special fund to
which faculty can apply; or deputizing the Instructional Task Force to make funding available where it would have the largest impact. We want to create an equitable model that does not disadvantage faculty who have caretaking responsibilities.

4. **Establish a process for safe, socially distant lecture recording (Instructional Support Services).**

Faculty may wish to record their lectures in classroom settings. Instructional Support Services established protocols to help faculty record classroom lectures this spring, which should continue. In addition, the Broadcast Center should develop similar protocols and a schedule to help faculty record and edit their lectures, perhaps with the paid help of student assistants, professionals in the video production industry that may currently be out of work, or others.

5. **Define “instructional hour” in the virtual context (Office of the Dean of the College).**

In our discussion about different approaches to enhancing engagement in the class, a number of questions were raised about what counts as an “instructional hour.” For instance, faculty may not know that a pre-recorded (“flipped”) lecture would count toward required weekly instructional hours (one-on-one equivalent). Student respondents indicated a preference for recorded lectures over live lectures, with the live meetings allowing for greater interaction. As faculty consider the redesign of their courses, we must have guidance on how different elements in the templates count towards the instructional hour requirements.

6. **Clarify whether faculty can use the 4:30 – 7:30 p.m. blackout slot for teaching (Dean of the College).**

On the faculty survey and in recent meetings, some requested an expanded teaching “day” to allow for additional classes and precepts and to offer faculty more flexibility in their schedules. Teaching during this time would also spread out the day for students and potentially alleviate Zoom exhaustion. From the other side, faculty in Theater, Dance, and Music hope to maintain that time for rehearsals and arts-based activity, in which students from across the University participate. Likewise, faculty voiced concern that the research community would suffer if the “set time” for talks at 4:30 became available for course scheduling.

7. **Establish a new course component, the “flipped lecture,” for faculty to use as a non-standard meeting time, decongesting course scheduling (Dean of the College).**

Princeton’s existing course catalog requires that all course components be assigned a timeslot but flipped classes with pre-recorded lectures will not require as many synchronous meeting times. Synchronous meetings for such classes could be reserved for precept times instead. Adding a “flipped lecture” course component would ensure students are not unnecessarily blocked from taking other classes in a regular timeslot.

8. **Clarify how the Library will make its resources available for faculty and student research and teaching.**

Faculty in the survey and in meetings—especially those in the humanities and in History—expressed anxiety about access to library books. One professor explained that she plans to assign a
book that is out of print, prohibitively expensive to buy, and unavailable as an e-book. Other faculty worry about how students will complete independent work without access to the library.

Expectations and priorities for digitizing books for teaching and for student independent work, as well as library access, should be clear, preferably with a timeline. The PUL Digital Task Force should meet with representatives from departments to prioritize digitization efforts and provide clear guidelines about copyright restrictions for teaching materials.

9. *Work with Labyrinth Books to determine how to supply books to students in time for fall semester (Dean of the College).*

With course and curricular changes, the Office of the Dean of the College will need to work closely with Labyrinth to work out the ordering and delivery of books. As one faculty member observed, “Not all of the books I use in my class are available as e-books.”

10. *Examine in more depth how to “virtualize” labs and studios.*

This is one of the fundamental questions this committee engaged, and one that faculty and students also mentioned in their surveys. We generated ideas such as sending students a kit of resources or materials to complete work at home, using existing online labs, or splitting off labs or practicum requirements as a separate course from the lecture course in the case of the sciences.

Given the specific concerns and necessary innovation required to address this element of online education, we recommend more sustained attention with a committee of faculty whose courses require such arrangements. We also recommend that we exercise creativity with our academic calendar; might students return to campus during the planned Wintersession for intensive academic experiences?

11. *Set grading policy (Committee on Examinations and Standing).*

The committee had numerous conversations about the need to establish a grading policy for an online semester or year. We also heard questions about this at DUS meetings, with some faculty endorsing a University-wide, top-down decision, and others preferring greater flexibility and more local solutions. We favor the former and recommend that the University establish a standard policy for grading. One committee member suggested that the University might allow students to “opt in” to letter grading.

12. *Refine guidance on academic accommodations (Office of Disability Services and Office of General Counsel).*

Faculty should have clear guidance on how accommodations for students are handled when instruction is delivered online. Guidance should be provided as soon as possible so that faculty have that information as they prepare their courses (it could be incorporated into the course templates, for example). We also encourage the Dean of the Faculty to provide guidance for faculty on requesting accommodations and services for themselves.

13. *Determine the equipment that faculty, graduate AIs, and students will need for virtual teaching and establish a process for making it available (Office of Information Technology).*

Report from Ad Hoc Committee on Online Teaching Excellence/May 2020/page 13
Student responses from the survey indicate the need to access specialized software available on cluster computers, lab computers, and computers in Data and Statistical Services and in their departments. They also report needing cameras, A/V equipment, and computers powerful enough for video editing. Faculty reported needing external monitors, document cameras, writing tablets, and other tools to conduct remote instruction. The committee also heard the need for tablet computers, so that students in language classes could write in non-Latin scripts.

14. **Develop guidance on questions of safety, privacy, and mental health (Dean of the College and General Counsel).**

In the faculty questionnaire, in the student survey, and in meetings, many faculty have expressed concern about safety and privacy. Some students are uncomfortable with peers and professors seeing where they live. Some students don’t have private or safe spaces to work or take class. Returning “home” for some students is anxiety-provoking, if not traumatizing.

In addition, some courses require space (such as a dance class). Graduate students have expressed concern that they have become ad-hoc mental health providers, with undergraduate students expressing their fears about their or their parents’ health, their lack of summer employment, and other concerns they felt uncomfortable bringing to the professor. One student noted that the home environment meant “my students can no longer maintain the boundaries that they would have liked to maintain with their preceptors.” Providing guidance or even training faculty and graduate student AIs about how to recognize distress and make referrals is essential.

**Conclusion**

What was at first a seemingly temporary disruption is now a looming reality for the upcoming year, if not longer. Remote instruction will be an unavoidable fact for the fall semester, even if some of the students are allowed back on campus. It is imperative that we all begin planning for this outcome immediately. The great strength of this university is the independence of its faculty and its distributed decision-making through academic departments. In this time of crisis, we will have to think boldly and act quickly, but do so in a manner that requires an unusual amount of coordination and communication.

The committee would like to thank all members of the Princeton community who assisted in our efforts through conversations, written responses to our questionnaire, memos, emails, and numerous other forms of input. In our research and through our deliberations, we gained an even greater respect for the deep commitment our faculty and staff have to educating and caring for our students.