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**An Optimized Online/Hybrid Learning Academic
Strategy & Faculty Capacity-Building Plan**

in response to the **COVID-19 HEALTH CRISIS**



**DOHA INSTITUTE
FOR GRADUATE STUDIES**

Doha Institute for Graduate Studies
Doha, Qatar

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I. Foreword

During these unprecedented times where a global pandemic has gripped the world and has rapidly, *forcibly* altered the modality of teaching and learning, higher education institutions are working diligently and strategically to minimize immediate and long-term repercussions of the health crisis. The Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (“The Institute”) is no exception. The months of March – August 2020 saw the Institute mobilize to ensure academic continuity through a rapid move to online and hybrid learning. Classes convened over Cisco Webex’s videoconferencing software until the end of the Spring term and faculty exerted efforts to expand their use of Moodle, the Institute’s Learning Management System (LMS), to provide students with access to learning resources, facilitate asynchronous discussion, receive assignment submissions, and administer assessments.

The Institute’s attempts to ensure academic continuity were rapid – and they paid off. The Spring semester of 2020 drew to a close on April 26th successfully, with only a single day of cancelled classes following the State of Qatar’s ministerial directive on March 9th to discontinue face-to-face study. However, the Institute – and other higher education institutions – finds itself seeking to move beyond a triage and stabilization mode that tackled an unforeseen interruption with exceptions and substitutions mid-semester, to a phase of increased creativity, optimization, and innovation in a new academic year.

This brief seeks to outline high level recommendations to the for transitioning to a phase of increased stabilization, optimization and innovation within the teaching and learning domain at the Doha Institute and other higher education institutions. This brief intends to prompt deliberate and practical steps to effectively adapt the DI’s graduate programs to online and hybrid delivery in a manner that enhances teaching and learning and optimally achieves the Institute’s academic mission.

II. Replication or Adaptation?

Many pedagogical experts, teaching and learning administrators, and seasoned instructors with face-to-face and online teaching experience will caution *against* the replication of traditional classroom teaching in virtual environments.

During the Spring 2020 semester, under significant time and resource constraints, courses continued virtually primarily by attempting to reproduce the face-to-face course experience within an online environment. The attempts were improvisations that strove for continuity, not necessarily quality. Focus was on providing access to learning in a temporary situation where cognizance of its deficiency was fully perceived.

It is important to acknowledge that there are substantial differences between crisis/emergency-induced remote learning and pedagogically-appropriate, carefully-designed online courses (Hodges et al., 2020). As HEIs look toward new academic years and consider the high likelihood of extended campus closure, purposeful course design and adaptation will be essential to achievement of the institute’s academic mission. It is expected that Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), the initial phase, will be replaced by effective online and hybrid education using pedagogical best practices.

Given the recent past experiences with significant disruption to face-to-face instruction, it is an opportune time to adapt HEI program courses for online delivery using an Optimized Online Academic Strategy and Faculty Capacity-building Plan.

III. Why an Optimized Online/Hybrid Academic Strategy?

In preparation for the potential for the Covid-19 health crisis to continue beyond the current successive variants that have halted in-person instruction, and also to ensure preparedness for other potential disruptions and a commitment to adapt to a “new normal,” the Institute recommends the launch of an **Optimized Online/Hybrid Academic Strategy (OOHAS)**.

The Optimized Online Academic Strategy endeavours to accomplish two things. First, it strives to ensure that instructional design and delivery provides the appropriate level of support to overcome the challenges associated with a campus closure and the cancellation of in-person classes. Second, it seeks to seize the present time of uncertainty and disruption as an opportunity to explore and pilot new modalities, pedagogical techniques, and technology-based resources that could endure well-past the crisis to enhance teaching and learning at the Doha Institute under regular operations.

The Optimized Online Academic Strategy has four-prongs, each with accompanying recommendations.

- (a) Course Review & Re-Design
- (b) Course Delivery Enhancement
- (c) Fit-for-Purpose Assessment
- (d) Engagement in Experiential Learning

RECOMMENDATIONS are highlighted in blue for visual ease.

IV. Course Review & Re-Design

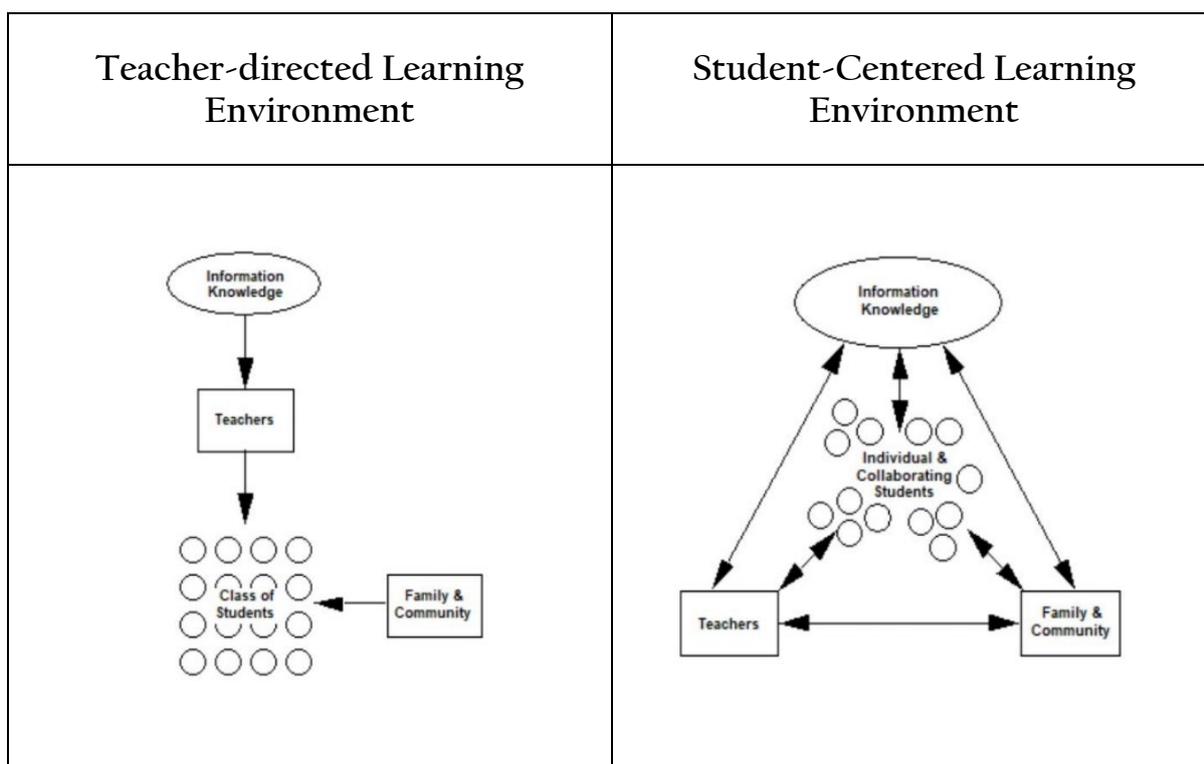
Research into effective online learning identifies nine dimensions for consideration. Each consideration is described along with a proposed recommendation for the Institute that is specific to its context and could inform other HEIs in their planning for online and hybrid delivery.

Online Learning Dimension	Considerations for HEIs	RECOMMENDATION #1
Modality	Will instruction be fully online with web-enabled face-to-face? Or Blended with classroom face-to-face?	<p>Ia. Plan for fully online instruction with web-enabled face-to-face (no physical contact). * Should Qatar’s Ministry change restrictions, a blended approach where students attend a periodic class with appropriate distancing measures can be explored (classes held only in large venues with 6-feet of distance between students).</p>
Pacing	Will the course be self-paced (open entry/exit)? Time-bound and instructor-paced? Or a combination of the two?	<p>Ib. Maintain an instructor-paced approach according to the established syllabus; however, modify the semester start to provide students with time to adapt to the new modality, i.e. build a “grace” period at the start of term.</p>
Instructor Role	Active instruction online? Minimal presence? No presence with content being made available with complete student autonomy and self-reliance?	<p>Ic. Adopt active instruction with increased and extended instructor presence for the Fall semester. This entails extending virtual office hours, providing immediate/timely responses, and giving frequent/ongoing and thorough feedback to students. DI instructor engagement and responsiveness via telephone, email, videoconferencing, and via the LMS should be consistently high. Active presence does not mean monopolizing lecture time.</p>
Student Role	To what extent does the student collaborate with the instructor and other students offline and online? Is it an autonomous offline environment? What level of dependence or self-direction is expected of the student?	<p>Id. Higher than usual student-to-content interaction offline should be anticipated and planned for a Fall potential transition to online learning, with online interaction focusing on student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction.</p> <p>Offline/asynchronous → increased student-to-content interaction (students complete readings and study content outside of lectures)</p> <p>Online/synchronous → student-to-student, student-to-instructor interaction (online lectures focus on discussion, interaction, constructivist learning)</p> <p>Why? To build an effective learning community.</p>

		<p>ie. To support this type of interaction, it is recommended that all Fall courses integrate an assessed participation grade that requires learners to actively demonstrate content interaction.</p>
<p>Student-Instructor Ratio</p>	<p>Will classes retain the same student-instructor ratio? Will they be increased? Decreased?</p>	<p>If. Given that the Institute has already given notices of acceptance, it is not possible to change cohort sizes; however, it is recommended that the DI reduce class size where feasible to increase student engagement and account for significantly increased faculty support for students. Research confirms that online teaching requires more faculty time and efforts. This should be taken into consideration with respect to Fall faculty workloads.</p>
<p>Online Communication Synchrony</p>	<p>Synchronous? Asynchronous? A mix of both?</p>	<p>Ig. Both synchronous and asynchronous communication is recommended for DI's online strategy, with live class interaction preferably recorded and posted to accommodate the possibility of students being in their home countries in different time zones.</p>
<p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>Will it maintain a teacher-centered approach? Student-centered? What learning theories is it based on?</p>	<p>Ih. A move to online teaching and learning will require that DI faculty adopt a learner-centered approach (more than ever before). This is also imperative for IQR accreditation. This means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher facilitates, not directs learning • Teacher helps students access and process knowledge • Student construct knowledge and meaning • Students are given access to a learning ecosystem in which to navigate and contribute to • Assessment is partially self and peer assessment <p>Please see Figure A on the following page.</p>
<p>Source of Feedback</p>	<p>Automated feedback? Unique-individualized feedback? Peer feedback?</p>	<p>Ii. As a graduate school, detailed, timely, and individualized feedback is a must. This becomes more critical in an online course where reinforcement of learning is especially needed. Faculty orientation and expectations should heavily emphasize this.</p>

<p>Role of Online Assessment</p>	<p>Is assessment designed to be assigned and administered effectively online? Is it mostly automated, input-to-grade?</p>	<p>Ij. To maintain quality and adequate student support, assessment should be redesigned to achieve the course learning outcomes. Input-to-grade (self-graded), multiple choice and other lower-order thought skills are not recommended. Assessments should test critical and higher order thinking skills. Consider revising assessment schemes to ladder one above the other to reinforce and extend learning and allow students to benefit from feedback.</p>
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Figure A: Teacher-directed vs. Student-centered Learning



Reference: Learner-centered Design (Hirumi, 2018)

To practically operationalize the above recommendations for modality, pacing, pedagogy, assessment, etc. for a move to online, the following is suggested.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Assign each instructor to review **their scheduled Fall course syllabus**. Using the provided template, each faculty member should answer the guiding questions and propose appropriate course elements for redesign.

Syllabus Review and (Potential) Re-Design

	Guiding Pointers & Questions for Instructor	Instructor Remarks	Program Head/Dean/School Council Approval
Course Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Under “Class Location” include: (1) Moodle Course Link; (2) The static (semester-long) course online videoconference lecture link. 		
Course Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review Course Description with online delivery in mind. Modify to reflect the adaptation. ▪ Is there any aspect of the course described here that will not be possible through online delivery? Speak to your PH/Dean. 		
Course Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review all CLOs. ▪ Is there any course learning outcome that requires additional support to be achieved? Specify what is required and request this of your PH/Dean. ▪ Are there CLOs that cannot be achieved through online delivery even with alternative resources? If so, can you propose how they can be achieved prior to student graduation (delayed)? 		
Course Format and Teaching Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update section to describe online course format and online teaching and engagement method. 		
Assessment Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revise assessment scheme to reflect online/distance delivery. Replace sit-in classroom exams with alternative assignments that test critical and higher-order thinking skills. Refer to teaching and learning assessment guidance if needed. 		
Course Syllabus Plan/Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revise and build a buffer or grace period at the start of the semester to account for students new to online. Invest in the first week to focus on accessibility to resources and building familiarity with peers. Adhere to the plan/schedule during the semester. 		

V. Course Delivery Enhancement

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Faculty presence is critical to student success in an online environment, where increased communication and “visibility” is necessary. To promote student success, it is highly recommended that the DI mandate that every course on offer in the Fall semester have a Moodle course shell populated with these elements as a minimum:

- Faculty Contact and Professional Biosketch
- Faculty’s Teaching Philosophy and Approach
- Faculty Office Hours
- Course Information /Official Syllabus
- A Welcome Message
- Learning Resources
- Assignment Drop-box

RECOMMENDATION #4:

With heavy reliance on virtual classes, it is recommended that every faculty member be supplied with a high-quality headset, mic, and web camera to use in the facilitation of class videoconferences. These can be distributed to every faculty member or made available through a sign-out process. (The former is highly encouraged).

RECOMMENDATION #5:

The production of high-quality lecture videos and podcasts in a (makeshift) studio using specialized IT equipment is highly recommended, along with the storage of such files in a Video Library/Repository. Considering online pedagogies and the optimal use of class time to reinforce learning and promote student collaboration and discussion, it is suggested that the three-month summer period be utilized to support faculty to prepare well-planned video-recordings. Such recordings can be posted in Moodle through links on a weekly basis in step with the pacing of the course. This would allow class lectures to focus on extending learning and higher order skills. It also would free up faculty time during the semester to provide individualized and extensive feedback, mentorship and support to students.

As an additional benefit, such videos increase the intellectual capital of the DI and meet differentiated learning standards that are highly encouraged by accrediting bodies in support of accessible and student-centered learning.

RECOMMENDATION #6:

Explore and offer a suite of virtual teaching tools for laptop installation for all faculty. For example, tools that integrate with Moodle like Panopto, which support video creation, can be purchased and installed. <https://www.panopto.com/features/integration/moodle/>

VI. Fit-for-Purpose Assessment

RECOMMENDATION #7:

A move to online learning will require rethinking assessment tools and methods. This document recommends the replacement of timed, sit-in exams for all Fall courses with alternative assessments that include self-assessments, peer-assessments, performance-based assessments, and assessments which focus on higher-order and critical thinking skills. Assessment in courses is also **highly** encouraged to include a Graded Participation, where students are expected to actively demonstrate their content knowledge and critical skills by communicating verbally and in-written form. This is recommended also to help the instructor build a more rounded perception of the learners' abilities and will help spot issues with academic integrity and plagiarism if they arise.

RECOMMENDATION #8:

In the event some courses cannot do without sit-in, timed exams due to professional regulation or other factors, the Institute and other HEIs should explore companies which professionally proctor online examinations. Instructors who will teach Fall courses in this situation should immediately identify this and due steps should be followed to secure professional proctoring services.

VII. Engagement in Experiential Learning

RECOMMENDATION #9:

It is recommended that in-person internships be replaced with alternatives in consultation with Department/Program Heads. Each program should submit a plan for operationalizing alternatives to internships, including the purchase of simulation software, conducting experiential-based projects, working as interns remotely, and using institutional labs (with appropriate physical distancing measures).

VIII. Faculty Capacity Building & Training Plan

The following pages outline faculty capacity-building initiatives which have already taken place, are currently in progress, and those which are recommended for coming phases of anticipated disruption. They are also recommended as the Institute adapts to a new normal, where traditionally face-to-face instruction is expected to become more malleable and lend more easily to hybrid and online modality.

The Institute and other HEI should undertake steps to engage faculty in teaching, learning and assessment development sessions. With the potential move to online/hybrid education, increased commitment and capacity will need to be generated among the faculty body. Effective online education requires specific skillsets that require regular updating. For these reasons, the following two recommendations have been forwarded.

RECOMMENDATION #10:

Seek robust professional certification in online teaching for all faculty teaching from expert providers. A minimum of 50% of faculty should be an aim, with priority to faculty with minimal online teaching experience. Certifications from respected experts in online and hybrid teaching, such as Quality Matters, should be sought, along with memberships with vendors which provide do-it-yourself-training, such as LinkedIn Learning (formerly Lynda.com). This training should be linked to faculty professional development plans and annual performance appraisals.

RECOMMENDATION #11:

It is recommended that HEIs hire Educational Technology Specialists to work within the Teaching and Learning unit in support of faculty technology integration. This need is well beyond the current outbreak and is required to support faculty choose and leverage appropriate technologies to support student learning in online and hybrid modalities.

Sample Faculty Development Plan

	Description	Course Titles
Spring Semester	This phase of faculty training and engagement focused on supporting faculty in the rapid transition to virtual classes and remote learning.	1. Leveraging Educational Technologies in Times of Disruption (Moodle Course)
		2. Moodle Basics
		3. Transitioning to Remote Teaching and Learning
End of Academic Year	As the Spring Semester and academic year draw to a close, five faculty training sessions will be delivered focusing on three themes: adapting and delivering curriculum online, designing assessment methods and accompanying rubrics, and nurturing equity and inclusion in the classroom. These themes have been derived from perceived and actual gaps in faculty skillset, and from priorities related to compliance with international higher education and accreditation standards.	4. Rethinking your Course Syllabus for Remote Teaching and Learning
		5. Fundamentals of Assessment Design for Online/Hybrid Learning
		6. Best Practices for Developing Effective Assessment Rubrics
		7. Adapting Classes for Delivery through WebEx
Summer Break	This phase has an essential capacity-building function where faculty undergo professional certification in teaching online. Knowledge gained will benefit faculty and students well beyond the current health crisis.	Online Teaching Certificate Program for at least 50% of full-time faculty teaching in the Fall semester
Fall Semester	The start of the academic year will focus on building capacity in new faculty joining DI who may also be new to online education.	<p>Online Faculty Orientation</p> <p>A series of in-house capacity building courses to orient faculty in the use of online teaching methods to be offered. A hired Senior Educational Technology Specialist would assist in this training delivery.</p>

IX. Conclusion

Contingency planning is an essential measure that every institution should undertake to handle the unexpected. The Institute tackled the unexpected in March and April of 2020 through an Emergency Remote Teaching approach. However, it is imperative that we look ahead to plan for full and partial transitions to online/hybrid education as a contingency to further Covid variants and to adapt to a new normal where some students can only participate in courses when they are flexibly delivered. This process requires change management practices where the institution is prompted to rally behind creative, evidence-based pedagogical and technical solutions with a clear vision and commitment for teaching excellence and achievement of academic mission to counter the ramifications of uncertainty and disruption...and to venture into new educationally innovative terrain.

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