Strategies for Refreshing Your Course

While next academic year may seem far away, learning from this year's teaching experiences can provide valuable insights for refreshing and improving future versions of your courses. Whether you'll be continuing to teach online or transitioning back to on-campus teaching (or both), here are strategies for making the most of the course refresh process by identifying and prioritizing changes that will have the greatest impact on your students' learning.

Begin Now, with a Light Touch

- Thankfully, refreshing a course involves a much lighter touch than developing it. Focus on using student feedback and other data to zero in on changes that will most affect your students' learning and overall experience.
- As you finish up this semester, start to pull together into one place any materials you have that will help you reflect and plan (see Gather and Analyze Data below).
- Skim the suggestions included here and ponder the range and scope of changes you might want to make (some major shifts, or just smaller tweaks?) What resources and support (from the TLL, IT, your teaching team, etc.) might you need? When might you be able to set aside time to work on your course refresh? The more lead time you have in reaching out for support, the better.

Reflect on Previous Semesters

Take time to think about how the course has been going – for you, the teaching team, and your students.

- What has worked well and what didn't seem to work well in this year's courses?
- Are your learning objectives still relevant?
- What are your assessments, and how are they linked to your learning objectives? In what ways do the results tell you whether or not students are meeting those objectives?
- How have your activities and content supported students in meeting the learning objectives, and how might you further strengthen this connection?

- What have students been confused about in the content? Where has the teaching team needed to step in and re-teach, or provide extra support materials at the last minute?
- Where have students been confused about course activities or communications? What needs to be clarified or streamlined?
- How has feedback on student work been provided and how well does it seem to help students learn? Any ways to improve those processes?

Gather and Analyze Data

Collect as much data as you can and review it to identify themes. It's common to see concerns related to course content, workload and pace, communication, assessment and feedback, and organization.

- Gather student feedback for your course, including formal feedback provided through surveys or evaluations, as well as informal feedback such as comments from students during class, in synchronous online sessions, or via email.
- Download the most recent MSES (Mid-year Student Experience Survey) report and related Teaching Takeaways summary [HGSE log-in required] for an overview of student feedback across HGSE courses.
- Review trends in performance on student assignments and activities.
- Collect any notes the teaching team took during the course. It may also be helpful to hold a teaching team debrief.
- If you're using Canvas, review your course content, structure, and organization and identify any updates needed.

Connect Onsite and Online

Consider how your experience online might inform and improve your on-campus teaching.

- What technologies would make sense to bring into the on-campus classroom, and why?
- What assessments and activities used online might work well on campus?
- What did you learn about communicating with your students online that could help support your on-campus teaching?
- What pedagogical moves did you make when teaching online that could benefit your on-campus teaching? E.g., more peer-based learning, soliciting student input more frequently, etc.
- What materials developed for your online course might you continue to use on campus?

🗺️ Prioritize and Plan

Time and resource constraints mean you'll need to make some tough decisions about what to prioritize in your course refresh.

- Identify high priority items--those that could (or did) most significantly impact student learning or the student experience.
- Organize your items by size – see below for examples:
    - Large tasks: making new videos or animations, revising the overall course structure, or overhauling multiple large assignments
    - Medium tasks: revising one or two assignments, revamping your feedback process or re-organizing items within the course
    - Small tasks: tweaking assignment instructions, moving a lecture to a different part of the course, or adding a student survey.
- Choose a set of items you can reasonably address before your course starts. Depending on the length of your list and your available time to work on the course, you may want to assemble a mix of small, medium, and large tasks.
- Set aside for later any non-critical revisions that you won't have time to accomplish.
- Review your course content, media, and communications in Canvas and identify any changes needed.
- Sketch out a timeline based on what needs to be accomplished. Start with actions where you know you will need additional resources and consider setting a date when you will reach out for support.

🖊️ Get the Support You Need

The School stands ready to provide assistance as you refresh and enhance your courses for the coming year. In particular, the Teaching & Learning Lab can provide a range of supports:

- Individual consultations on course re-design, learning from student feedback, creating activities and assessments to address learning objectives, etc.
- Assistance in re-organizing your Canvas site
- Media production support for asynchronous video and other materials

For larger, more resource-intensive tasks, the TLL will need significant advance notice in order to plan accordingly and to work with you over the summer months. To request TLL support, contact Bill Wisser at william_wisser@gse.harvard.edu.

For strategies on making revisions to online courses, consider the following resources [HGSE login required]:

Theme	Resources
Course content	Design: Preparation for Modules
Workload and pace	Make: Create Your Course Map
Communication	Teach: Designing for Social Presence Teach: Designing for Teaching Presence
Assessment	Types of assessment Creating a balanced assessment strategy
Organization	Design: Learning Sequence

TLL