Best Practices in Online Testing
Teaching Remotely: Shared Experiences

Summary of virtual panel event held on August 20th, 2020
[Link to video]

As classrooms continue to go virtual, our approaches to student testing must be re-evaluated. What worked in-person may not always work online. Delivering student assessment in a digital space creates unique challenges and opportunities.

Panelists:

Steve Hranilovic: Associate Dean (Academic) & Professor, Electrical and Computing Engineering, Faculty of Engineering

Behrouz Bakhtari: Assistant Professor, Operations Management, DeGroote School of Business

Linda Davis: Instructional Assistant & Lecturer, Chemical and Chemical Biology, Faculty of Science

Bridget O'Shaughnessy: Associate Professor, Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences

Panel Questions:

What are some of the challenges you've faced while transitioning from in-person testing to online assessments?

What have you changed in your approach to testing to adapt to this new environment?

What has been most effective for you in planning for and delivering an online assessment?

5 Key Takeaways from the panel

1) Respondus proctoring software has officially been adopted by McMaster; however, it is crucial that professors continue to make an active effort to create assessments that don't require policing and individualization of our learning spaces. [1:59-5:17]

2) It is important for faculty members to be flexible with their course design throughout the semester. Making small tweaks along the way and constantly assessing the integrity and fairness of your assessments is crucial. [22:39-23:43]

3) It is crucial to review online assessments to ensure they are accurate and performing correctly. Even small errors in how a test performs can have large ripple effects and cause increased stress for students. [36:09-37:12]

4) Low stakes assessments reduce the temptation of students to cheat and collaborate. The marks on these assessments tend to be very similar or lower than midterms or term test averages. [41:24:44:21]

5) Academic integrity is one of the largest challenges we have as an accredited program and it is our responsibility as gatekeepers of education to monitor student behavior and find alternative testing methods. [49:58-50:55]
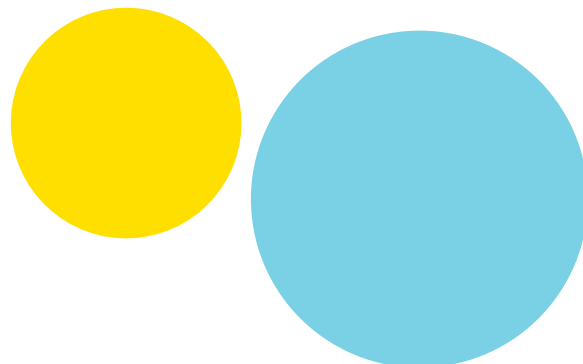
Some key takeaways from each panelist

Steve Hranilovic, Associate Dean and Professor, Electrical and Computing, Faculty of Engineering

- Faculty members should consider revising their courses to incorporate group assessments and project-based experiential learning. This helps students develop transferable skills and removes the burden of final examinations. [54:04-55:37]
- Instructors should consider setting up official MS teams for assessments. Students can collaborate in this space or use it as a discussion chat. While this chat space should be moderated by teaching assistants, it allows students to participate in the problem-solving process instead of simply getting the correct answer from a peer. [55:51-56:54]
- Instructors should also consider adopting the hybrid models of testing. Hybrid collaborative testing models allow students to take a midterm or a test individually and in whatever format. They then receive feedback and the opportunity to retake another test on the same material in a group setting. The weight is distributed between these two tests with a higher emphasis on the individual test. [56:55-58:55]
- Instructors may also consider offering students a dry run test. These are assessments with no value, that are formatted in a very similar manner to the actual graded assessment. This may help reduce apprehension of students when they write the actual graded examination. [1:00:10-1:00:40]

Behrouz Bakhtari, Assistant Professor, Operations Management, Degroote School of Business

- For faculty members that are teaching a quantitative course, Avenue has the option to create arithmetic questions. You can use this tool to provide all students with the same question but different values for numbers. [29:03-31:51]
- Instructors need to ensure that their assessments are fair for all students. The primary issue with using question banks and big pools is that you can't guarantee all tests will have the same level of difficulty. [33:05-35:13]

Linda Davis, Instructional Assistant and Lecturer, Chemical and Chemical Biology, Faculty of Science

- To avoid academic integrity issues instructors can create large question banks and randomize the questions. They should also ensure that answers aren't prevalent on Google and require a degree of critical thinking. [9:45- 12:23]
- It is crucial for faculty members to maintain transparency with their students during this time. Open communication ensures that both parties are satisfied with the ultimate outcome. [17:49-19:02]
- To avoid lag and delays in response for large-sized classrooms, instructors should provide students with different login times for the test. For example, students A to G will login at 7pm, while students H to I will login at 7:15pm. [21:02-21:58]

Bridget O'Shaughnessy, Associate Professor, Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences

- Instructors should consider eliminating long midterms and final examinations and switch to bi-weekly topic quizzes. Faculty members have found these quizzes are just as difficult as term tests and force students to keep up with weekly tasks. [38:29-39:12]
- Instructors should consider keeping their midterms and quizzes open for a longer period of time to accommodate international students who are in different time zones. Inform students that once they open the quiz they will only have 30 minutes to complete it. [44:44-46:13]

Referenced Resources:
Tests and Exams in Avenue to Learn
Avenue to Learn

McMaster University | BRIGHTER WORLD