

Teaching Students in Multiple Time Zones

Right now, our students are spread out across the world, often participating in our courses from multiple time zones. Our undergraduate international students have noted [particular challenges related to online learning](#). Complementing the suggestions from Northwestern's International Undergraduate Working Group, the following strategies can further support our students' learning:

- **Use [NU Worldwide](#) to easily see which students are in a different time zone from the instructor.** This can help instructors decide on assignment due dates or meetings times, and to be flexible about when assignments are due. Small groups might also be organized by time zone, so that students may be able to work together more effectively.
- **Maximize asynchronous activity.** Instead of offering primarily synchronous sessions, ask students to complete work and engage with their peers (e.g., videos, ungraded quizzes, critical reflections, readings, homework, discussion boards etc.) on their own time. This can help students think more deeply about course content and give them time to formulate critical and/or creative responses to their peers. Northwestern's [Digital Learning website](#) has many useful strategies and tools.
- **Incorporate inclusive teaching practices** into your course environment. Review Northwestern's Principles for Inclusive Teaching or the Searle Center's [Creating Inclusive Learning Environments](#) for guidance.
- **Rethink traditional exams.** Rather than having timed exams, consider alternative approaches, such as group exams, untimed take-home exams, or projects. Timed tests in the middle of the night can create a disadvantage for students outside the U.S. Using alternative approaches can mitigate anxiety and stress, reduce faculty concerns over cheating, as well as support student learning.
- **Be mindful that some students may be located in regions with restrictions and/or have governments that access or surveil online activity.** Students may have uneven access to Google products and some U.S media platforms, and some library and web content may be blocked as well. Find ways to offer alternative assignments as appropriate and consider what might constitute "participation" in your course (and how you are assessing it). In cases of unstable internet, students should know what protocol to take should their internet access be interrupted.
- **Find ways to connect with your students:** Regularly message your students, collectively and individually, to connect with them. In large classes, you could use a tool like mail merge to send individualized messages to motivate and encourage your students. Polls (like poll anywhere) or ungraded canvas quizzes can be quick ways to gauge the pulse of your class. Provide prompt feedback around their learning through Canvas.
- **Be empathetic and open to your students' needs and concerns:** Our students are all struggling right now. Offer additional resources on the syllabus (related to the course content as well as for their emotional and physical needs) and remind students about them. Reach out to students; check in with them and find ways to make yourself available. Acknowledge the context and consider this additional [guidance on teaching during turbulent times](#).