

**Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse International Students in Open and/or  
Online Learning Environments: A Research Symposium**

**Pivoting to Remote Learning: Our Practices for Supporting Non-  
Traditional International Students and Part-Time Contract  
Instructors**

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**Abstract**

*Extended Education at the University of Manitoba offers 12-month, full-time, face-to-face intensive programming to internationally educated professionals. This programming consists of two credentials and academic language support completed over 10 months, followed by an industry experience. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Extended Education pivoted quickly to develop a strategy to move courses offered to international students from a traditional face-to-face situation to a remote-learning delivery format. In order to ensure a successful transition, the developed strategy involved providing administrative and academic support to international students and part-time contract instructors. This session will highlight some of the initiatives implemented by Extended Education at the University of Manitoba to support its international students and part-time contract instructors through the transition, and discuss their effectiveness and correlation to student success. The session will also provide insights into factors to consider when planning for future programming opportunities, such as a hybrid model of learning.*

**Keywords:** international, students, instructors, remote, supports

## Extended Abstract

Extended Education (EE) at the University of Manitoba offers 12-month, full-time, face-to-face intensive programming (IP) to internationally educated professionals. This programming consists of two credentials and academic-language-support workshops completed over 10 months, followed by an industry experience, which can be acquired through either a 175-hour industry placement or an industry-experience course. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, EE pivoted quickly to develop a strategy to move courses offered to international students from a traditional face-to-face environment to a remote-learning delivery format. To ensure a successful transition, the developed strategy involved providing administrative and academic support to the international students and part-time contract instructors.

The strategy employed over the last three terms was a collaborative effort between the Intensive Programming (IP) Delivery team, consisting of one manager and 10 support staff and the Instructor Professional Development and Support (PDS) team, consisting of one lead and two other academics, and provided administrative and academic supports to non-traditional international students and part-time contract instructors, with a focus on student success and instructional quality.

A review of available resources concluded that UM Learn or D2L, the University of Manitoba's learning management system, and Cisco WebEx, UM Learn's virtual collaboration tool, would be used when developing supports and resources.

Also, being mindful of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, when developing our student and instructor supports and resources, when appropriate, the EE Grandfather-in-Residence was consulted on and participated in the initiatives.

For international students, administrative supports included, among others, a Student Portal—a UM Learn-based course that provided links to the resources, policies and forms, program information, on-campus supports and resources, including health, mental health, and career development resources. In addition, a series of online, drop-in sessions were launched to provide students with an opportunity to connect with peers, engage in virtual games, and learn about Canadian content.

The IP Delivery team also provided an Enhanced Student Orientation week, which included a series of live sessions with their program coordinators, Office of Student Advocacy, Student Accessibility Centre, health-insurance representative, and industry placement team. A highlight of the orientation week was an opportunity to spend time with Grandfather-in-Residence to learn about Indigenous perspectives, hear first-hand experiences, have time to reconnect with an inner-self, and reflect on the current world situation.

Attendance tracking was another tool that was utilized to identify and proactively follow up with at-risk students. Instructors were asked to report absences and patterns of behaviour to the IP delivery team, who, in turn, reached out to students to identify the best ways of support, provide referrals, and advise on processes.

The alumni panel discussion was another way to provide students with an opportunity to engage and benefit from the advice and suggestions of our graduates.

For the additional academic supports, several modifications were made to meet the changing needs of our students. These major changes were reflected in the content, academic language supports and industry placements.

The first and foremost change was providing IP students with access to additional course materials, which only online students would have had access to in the past. As a result, the remote learning students had an opportunity to join live remote instructor classes, and at the same time, be able to work through the content at their own pace. In addition to full access to self-paced content, all live classes were recorded and made available for students. This allowed for additional flexibility, and addressed issues related to technical and time-zone challenges.

Through the academic language support and other optional workshops, the team provided sessions on study skills' topics, such as Studying and Working Remotely: Communication, Resources, and Engagement; Group Work; and Maintaining Academic Integrity.

To support our students with gaining Canadian work experience during the period of restrictions, and organizations shifting to remote work, we were very successful in working with our industry hosts, navigating through the new regulations, and securing remote-industry placements for all eligible IP students. This allowed students to participate in placements from the comfort of their homes and home countries.

With respect to our part-time contract instructors, we recognized that they would need to be supported administratively and pedagogically, in order to maintain instructional quality. Two initiatives included: 1) the Instructor Portal, and 2) the Instructor Orientation Week.

Making use of UM Learn, IP Delivery and Instructors PDS, teams began to work on the EE Instructor Portal which became a hub for both administrative and academic supports and resources for our part time contract instructors.

The Instructor Portal opens with the UM's Land Acknowledgement and a section called Taku Wakan or "something holy," which contains Indigenous teachings for instructor self-development.

For administrative supports and resources, the EE Instructor Portal contained program information and policies, as well as video and text-based resources on IP Delivery and UM Learn FAQs.

In addition, the resources included a checklist and a term to-do list. The checklist contained a list of start-of-term instructor administrative tasks/responsibilities, such as reading the IP FAQs, attending the orientation, and completing the IP Instructor Orientation Quiz. The term to-do list focused on teaching expectations and recommendations, such as creating a welcome message and providing on-going student feedback.

In the EE Instructor Portal, an Instructor PDS section was created that contained pedagogical resources in a variety of mediums, such as text and video, on a variety of topics, such as instructor expectations and responsibilities with respect to students, promoting student engagement, promoting academic integrity, and using technology to enhance student learning.

Building on the pedagogical topics and resources listed above, a variety of optional synchronous and interactive professional development sessions were offered using UM Learn's virtual collaboration tool, WebEx. In one term, there were 4-6 lunch-hour sessions facilitated by a variety of in-house and guest presenters and these were recorded. Over the past year, the sharing of best practices has not only helped our instructors with their pedagogical needs, but has also helped to create a sense of community among our instructors.

Lastly, in addition to the synchronous PD sessions, the instructor PDS team also provided one-on-one WebEx and pedagogical support sessions.

Our new and improved orientation week began with a mandatory, interactive, term-specific, 2-hour, IP instructor-orientation session for seasoned and new instructors, which included program information and breakout sessions about the best practices on topics, such as student engagement, teaching international students, and promoting academic integrity. After the 2-hour session, all instructors were asked to complete an online orientation quiz.

For new instructors, there were also mandatory sessions on getting ready to teach remotely, and Indigenous teachings with our Grandfather-in-Residence. For all instructors, there were optional WebEx practice sessions, additional PD sessions, and separate IP Delivery, PDS and UM Learn Q&A sessions to give instructors the opportunity to ask targeted questions to each team.

Overall, the instructor portal, professional development and support sessions, as well as the revised structure of the IP Instructor Orientation Week have been well-received by instructors. Many instructors appreciate the available resources and supports, as well as the opportunity to gather as an instructor community.

The impact of the above-mentioned changes on students included several areas. First, there was an increased uptake and utilization of student support mechanisms and resources. We were successful in providing students with opportunities to connect, reach out, and independently navigate the resources, both administrative and academic, using both the Student Portal and the added course content. Students' levels of flexibility have gone up, and we have received positive feedback on the ability to navigate the content independently and access class recordings. Based on the feedback received, instructors felt more prepared for the remote teaching and better equipped to navigate the expectations. Special attention from the feedback was also given to the value and importance of the instructor community and conversations. Finally, the ability to offer remote industry placements has added significant value to students in a time of restrictions, layoffs, and business closures. Hearing success stories of IP students being offered full-time employment upon completion of the industry placements provided a highly needed confirmation of the program packages' success, and the additional initiatives and support systems outlined above.

Over the past year, our students, instructors, and EE academic and support staff have recognized the importance and benefits of having a combination of synchronous and asynchronous delivery modes. Such benefits include increased flexibility for students and instructors, as well as promotion of student engagement both in (tools) and outside (extra-curricular activities) of the classroom. In the future, we would like to continue to explore a hybrid delivery model that incorporates both the online and face-to-face programs, and explore new areas for program development.