These notes expand on some of the pedagogical issues that came up during the conversation and provide some strategies for looking forward to teaching in the fall semester.

**Issue 1: Reflection can help you gain a sense of control and make the most of the transition to remote learning.**
As this extraordinary semester comes to a close, instructors continue to work hard to make sound decisions about assessment and grading. This semester has been and continues to be challenging, so it may be tempting to finish your teaching duties and turn all your attention to other aspects of your work life, but don’t pass up the chance to take stock and make the most of the experiences you’ve just had. Taking some time to reflect on your teaching experience will allow you to develop new skills and help you refocus your thinking about teaching in a positive way as we head toward what is still an uncertain autumn.

**Questions to help you reflect on your experience**

*What worked?* As you think about your remote teaching experience, consider the steps that you and your students took each week. Identify the steps that worked well to move students toward your learning goals: did students respond well to discussion board prompts, assignments, assessments, breakout group discussion in Zoom, peer editing activities, virtual labs? Consider the format your online teaching took and identify what aspects worked well: how did students manage components like synchronous learning, asynchronous learning, coming to virtual office hours, responding to announcements and emails?

*Why did those elements of your teaching work well?* As you consider what worked well, it’s wise to dig into the conditions that brought about student learning. Examine how you prepared students for an activity or assignment that went particularly well. What kinds of guidance did you give them? What kinds of feedback did they use to do the work? What preparatory steps preceded the work they did well? Capturing these details will make it likely that you can reuse these successful teaching strategies.

*What did you find challenging?* As you think about this question, take a few moments to recognize that all instructors faced challenges as they taught remotely this spring. You’re not alone! Identify what was difficult for you and then begin to make notes about where you can get support to tackle these difficulties. It’s productive to see these challenges as barriers that you can lower with the right kinds of resources and guidance. Prioritize the areas where you know you will need help to tackle these challenges.

*What will you change?* As you reflect on teaching remotely, you may realize that you have already made some decisions about how you will teach differently in the future, whether you teach face-to-face or remotely. For example, there may be assignments that just didn’t work and that you want to replace. You may have found a particular way of setting up asynchronous discussions that worked well and you want to use a similar format to structure discussions in the
future whether you teach face-to-face or remotely. If you know what you want to change, make a note of that now so that your insights into your teaching effectiveness don’t get lost this summer.

How should you use these reflections about your teaching experiences? If you’ve reflected on your teaching experience, you are ready to use those reflections to make new teaching decisions to strengthen your teaching and improve your students’ learning as we move forward toward summer and autumn. Request a consultation with an ITLAL instructional consultant who will guide you through that process. Making the most of your experiences of teaching during the pandemic allows you to take back some control of this part of your life and make your teaching easier going forward!

Issue 2: Using what you learned from the spring to prepare for fall
During the weeks of remote learning, instructors had to rapidly learn new skills and change how they teach and interact with students. Some of these new skills are ones that can be used to good effect regardless of the mode in which teaching takes place in the future. The reflection that we suggest above may help you identify some productive changes that you made in your own teaching, but it may be helpful to learn what other instructors have identified as positive changes that have helped them develop their teaching repertoire.

Changes to teaching that instructors have found useful

Making expectations explicit
Many instructors learned this semester that remote teaching requires them to be much more deliberate and precise in how they describe their expectations for the assignments, activities, and interactions they require of students. Because remote courses don’t always offer opportunities to address student questions about assignments and activities face-to-face, instructors often need to provide clearer written instructions to make course assignments transparent to students. The reality, though, is that students in all courses benefit from having clear expectations for their work. In order to understand what is expected of them, students need to know the purpose and value of class requirements; the knowledge and skills needed for success on those requirements; and the preparatory, thinking, and action steps they should take to do the work required. Research suggests that making assignments transparent in this way can greatly increase learning and retention.

Designing discussions that require each student to contribute
Many instructors learned this semester that online discussions require more deliberate structure than face-to-face discussions. In a face-to-face course, instructors might be able to begin with questions like “What did you think about the readings in relation to the video case we just watched?” or “What strategy did you use to successfully complete the problem set I assigned?” and have several students respond. Those kinds of open-ended prompts don’t work very well in an online discussion because students may not feel like they have much to respond to in each other’s posts. However, requiring students to explain their reasoning by posing a prompt like “Which of the four theories you read about would help you solve the problem in the video case we just watched? Why?” or “There were three different strategies you could have used to
complete the homework problem set. Explain why you chose the strategy you did and make a case for why it’s the most efficient strategy to solve problems of this type.” These prompts work even more effectively when students must post their individual response before they can see other students’ thinking and provided careful guidance to critique, elaborate on, or contrast their thinking with their peers’ ideas. Research suggests that careful design on online discussions leads to better student outcomes.

**Rethinking assessments to ensure students reach course goals**

Many instructors learned this semester that they needed to carefully evaluate the assignments and assessments that they had originally planned for students. In some cases, instructors discovered that only one or two aspects of an assessment were what they wanted students to focus on, so they refocused the assessment of those parts and dropped other aspects of the assessment that were not as important for student learning. Others discovered that they could reduce the number of assignments or assessments students did without impacting student learning. This kind of analysis and evaluation of course assessments, which instructors don’t always take time to do, can provide greater focus for the work that is required of students. Research suggests that courses with focused and carefully-designed assessments improve student learning outcomes.

**Keeping your lecture recordings**

Many instructors learned this semester that there can be multiple benefits to recording lectures not only for remote courses but for face-to-face courses as well. When students can watch lectures before a class meeting, class time can be used to have them apply what they have learned from the lecture. Instructors can then observe that application and give students the feedback they need to improve their thinking. “Flipping” the class this way means that students come to class (face-to-face, via a Zoom meeting, or to a structured activity or discussion in an asynchronous class) ready to work and have a realistic disciplinary experience where we can see their progress. In a traditional class, students do their practice through homework experiences and assignments after sitting through our lectures in class. In a flipped class, recorded lectures become the homework and the practice becomes the meat of instructor-student interactions. Research suggests that well-designed flipped classrooms are a powerful way to improve student learning.