How to Be Flexible and Offer Support During Spring 2020 Finals

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The Covid-19 crisis means none of us are operating business-as-usual, and while the weeks leading into final exam period are typically stressful, the current pandemic and the conditions it has created for students and instructors alike challenge us to be thoughtful about our final outcomes and to revise or rethink them in light of the unexpected pressures students are currently facing.

Substituting a new earlier date for the previously scheduled university date of a timed final exam can cause significant stress since students may have many exams and commitments. Students can be provided with a broad multi-day window inclusive of the original date for taking the exam. The multi-day window is a best practice.

Many undergraduate and graduate students at UNM are parents of children of all ages who are at home rather than day care, K-12 schools, and college. Other students might find themselves serving as primary care givers to extended family members. Setting aside two hours of uninterrupted time to complete a timed exam or essay on Learn might prove to be difficult, if not impossible, in one sitting. So, instead, faculty and instructors might offer a flexible final exam that allows students to complete it asynchronously, across a longer stretch of time. The same might be said for final research papers or projects. With no access to library archives and very limited access to most books in our library stacks, students might find it difficult to complete longer research-based essays with the requisite depth and scope of scholarship. Faculty and instructors might scale back the length of the essay and be willing to accept e-books and electronic research resources in lieu of more traditional forms of scholarship. A number of ideas are presented in this Chronicle of Higher Education essay: https://www.chronicle.com/article/What-Do-Final-Exams-Mean/248644.

Consider adjusting and adapting final exams, essays, or projects in clearly communicated ways and without last minute switches to earlier deadlines to better facilitate student success during these extraordinary times. Please consult with your department chair or associate dean for additional guidance around how best to support students with a flexible final assignment or exam.
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Best wishes in these hard times,

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