Larry DeBoer, Purdue Professor of Agricultural Economics, has used practice exams for years, drawing from a question bank. He has also taught online sections of his course along with traditional, in-person lecture classes, using similar assessments and exams for both versions. Below, he explains the use of his practice exams, and how he plans to modify the format of his final exam in response to emergency remote teaching needs:

“I always make an online practice exam available for the final: 50 questions drawing from a pool of 200+, on the same topics and in the same order as the actual exam. It gets used a lot. Last semester 361 out of 473 students tried it (or at least opened it), and it was tried 973 times, so about 2.7 times per student who tried.

For my final exam, I decided to make it open book, un-timed, and for it to be available Monday through Friday during Finals week. The exam will draw 40 or 50 questions from a pool of (perhaps) 150, by topic area, and each student will get three tries. Because it’s open book and they’ve got the whole week, I have no compunctions about making it harder than usual. That way repeating it a second or third time, with mostly new questions, will take quite an effort. The idea for allowing 3 chances is to lessen the possibility that some students will draw harder questions than others. It should also lessen the anxiety.

The random draw should make consulting other students harder, and I’ll include a first ‘question’ reminding them of the Honor Pledge. I’ll also try to be very clear as to what is allowed and what isn’t. Consulting the textbook or re-listening to a lecture is okay, asking a fellow student or your Mom who works for Chase is not. I’m hoping Blackboard will allow me to do a random draw without replacement—i.e., no repeat questions. I suppose some people will cheat, but in the end, we just have to trust.

I have no idea what this will do to the grades. Higher? Lower? Who knows? I’m sure that not everyone will get perfect scores. My online students did four “project quizzes” last semester, which had 20 or so multiple-choice questions worth 45 to 51 points, open book, notes, videos, etc., with the ability to consult with other students (almost all were on campus). The average score was 69%. It’s possible that the grades will be like my actual final, or even lower.”

For resources on exams, click here for the Teaching Remotely webpage. For questions about this and other Teaching Remotely topics, email innovactivelearningteam@purdue.edu.