

Questions and Issues Surrounding Course Modalities for Fall 2020

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Below are some thoughts and guidance regarding course delivery issues that have arisen since students received their new course schedules last week. This is the best advice we can offer as of today, recognizing that the situation is fluid with respect to UA policy and the arc of the COVID disease stats. So, these recommendations may need to be altered as the landscape shifts in the coming weeks. For the moment, I hope this helps you to deal with student concerns. Please share widely with your faculty and advising staff.

- **Student misconception: many think they can choose the modality in which they'll receive each course**
 - Fact: Each course section offered in Fall 2020 will have one delivery modality, selected by the faculty member (4 possible selections). A given student's semester schedule may have several modalities represented, and students are free to switch their enrollments to sections with preferred modalities. But, once enrolled in a section, they do not have the option to choose a mode different from what the instructor has selected
- **Accommodations for students who become ill and can't attend a synchronous class**
 - The UA communications regarding course modalities state that "all courses will provide options for students who are unable to come to campus due to illness or other temporary circumstances." So, how will this work?
 - Each instructor should provide access to some/all materials asynchronously in case students are unable to watch live lectures. But the expectation is to do this in a way that does not "put too much burden on the instructors" (per email communication from Alex Underwood, Registrar, July 9, 2020)
 - Record synchronous sessions and make them available for students through D2L. For most classrooms, this will be just audio and screen shots.
 - Provide slides, readings, video content, guided exercises through D2L.
 - Provide office hours weekly through Zoom and allow for telephone-based office hours (particularly important for rural and Native American students who often lack high-speed internet connections)
 - **NOTE:** all of this is meant to accommodate students who are temporarily absent from class meetings (in the three synchronous modalities). This is not the same experience as they would get from an iCourse taught fully online, but it should allow students to continue to keep pace and make progress if they must miss a few classes due to illness, without placing an undue burden on faculty.
 - **NOTE:** It seems to me that every faculty member needs to have a D2L site set up for their course. The large majority of CALS faculty already do this, but for those who haven't in the past, this is the semester to start. I do not see how you can make the accommodations above without it.

- **Concerns expressed by students/parents/faculty regarding returning to campus because of the COVID spike in Arizona, and preference for online courses**
 - Fear is legitimate and understandable, given Arizona's prominence in the national headlines for our number of cases, positive test percentages, and hospitalizations. Appearances of calamity almost always increase with distance from the epicenter, so our stakeholders in the Midwest, California, and elsewhere likely have a grimmer impression of the situation than those of us here in Tucson who have been riding this out all summer. Nevertheless, these fears may impact decisions to return for the Fall.
 - Some of our students are asking if they can switch to taking their courses online. This may stem from the student misconception (noted above) that they can choose the delivery mode for each of their courses. We need to communicate clearly that this is not the case.
 - Some faculty are asking if they can convert their Flex In-Person courses to Live Online. We do not have a definitive answer from the Provost office on this, yet. We do know that the Provost has re-iterated that it is still a priority for the UA to deliver as much course content in person as possible. Switching an in-person course to one of the two online modes erodes this goal. Faculty and Unit Heads will need to continue these discussions if a faculty member has a strong preference (and underlying health reason) for switching to online at this late date.
 - What to do about students who are afraid to return to campus? We don't want to lose them for the Fall. Many units have a large portion of their courses scheduled to be delivered in one of the two in-person modes, and especially so for upper division courses in the major. Switching those sections to Live Online is problematic for at least two reasons: 1) the Provost priority for in-person delivery, and 2) surely a significant number of students currently enrolled would prefer to be taking the course in person, and would be unhappy if the course was switched to online mode. So, what to do?
 - Outreach from the Unit Head (with follow-up by the advising team) to clarify the actual risks: clear-eyed assessment of disease stats and trends; description of the safety protocols in campus buildings and classrooms (social distancing and reduced classroom capacities; masks; cleaning and sanitization; testing and temperature checks in dorms). An upbeat, positive message that doesn't skirt the facts but does offer an honest assessment could go a long way toward calming fears in families that otherwise really want their students to continue making progress here.
 - If the numbers of students truly on the cusp of not returning seems sufficiently large, open up Live Online sections of your key major courses that are currently offered in an in-person mode, and allow students to switch (vote with their feet). This will require extra faculty compensation (either in credit toward their normal year's course load, or in supplemental comp), because it certainly will involve extra work. This probably doesn't make sense unless you have at least 8-10 students who would otherwise not return. You can set your break-even parameters. My guess is that the actual number of students still on the cusp of not returning after your information campaign about the risks (and the fact that the course is

currently only offered in one modality, and not theirs to choose) will be small. But, if not, you do have this option of opening another section.

- **Strong possibility that most classes will convene on August 24 in an online mode, for up to several weeks**
 - On Saturday, July 11, the Provost communicated this to the Deans. It is not definite, and no decision has been made as of today. But, school districts in both Phoenix and Tucson as well as community colleges in Maricopa County have announced that they are delaying the start of their semesters, or starting in online mode until September or October. We may end up doing the same.
 - The communication highlighted that some small classes (e.g., labs, performance-based classes, etc) may convene in person due to the difficulty of switching to online mode.
 - We can't communicate this yet to students with any certainty. But all faculty should be aware and prepare accordingly for up to several weeks of online delivery, regardless of your stated course delivery modality. Get those D2L sites ready!

We will do our best to keep you updated as we receive new information. I have found the weekly Re-Entry updates by President Robbins and Dr. Richard Carmona to be extremely helpful in gauging the pulse of campus and likely direction forward. Tune in every Thursday morning at 10:00 for the latest.