2/27/2021

Dear Executive Officers and Departmental Schedulers,

Our goal for the Fall 2021 semester is to increase the amount of in-person instruction. We learned this year that students want and need more in-person instruction, and they are very appreciative of those instructors who are currently offering such courses.  With no indication that any COVID-19 transmission has taken place in classrooms, we have also learned that our COVID-19 safety protocols permit in-person instruction to be carried out safely.  In addition to the broad goal of more in-person instruction, it is important that units think strategically about course modality to meet student needs and focus upon student success.

Regarding the Fall 2021 course scheduling process, our near term goal is to have the Fall 2021 Class Schedule available by April 5. Continuing students will register for fall classes beginning April 19.

While vaccines are becoming available, the anticipated state of the COVID-19 pandemic mid-August remains uncertain. Ultimately, details regarding fall instruction will be based upon guidance provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH.) As we plan for the fall semester, we anticipate that conditions are likely to have improved significantly from the current state, although we do not expect that life will have returned to the pre-pandemic normal.

At this time, we ask that you develop a fall instructional plan for your unit that can be used to build the Class Schedule.  This plan will be based upon our best knowledge at this point along with the assumptions outlined below. Proceeding in this way will allow us to build the Class Schedule and move forward with student registration while preserving flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances – better or worse than expected – ahead of the fall term.

We utilize the following assumptions to develop a plan:

* Widespread vaccinations will be complete by the beginning of the Fall 2021 semester. (Note: all in-person instructors will continue to be members of a priority vaccination group.)
* The State of Illinois will be in Phase 5 of Restore Illinois, allowing large gatherings.
* Existing COVID-19 mitigation strategies – face coverings, twice per week testing, contact tracing – will continue to be in effect.
* We will continue to limit building access to students, faculty and staff who are in good standing with respect to COVID testing. Vaccination status might also be utilized as a consideration for in-person participation.

With the assumptions outlined above, we anticipate that a significant amount of in-person instruction will be feasible, although not necessarily at full classroom capacity.  For planning purposes, we assume that relaxed social distancing requirements will allow us to operate our classrooms and instructional spaces at 50% of normal room capacity.  For example, a classroom that normally holds 100 students will be permitted to hold 50 students sitting “every other seat.”  We also assume that the maximum classroom capacity will be approximately 200 individuals.  (Please note: operating classrooms at 50% capacity is NOT the same as saying that we will offer half of our curriculum in-person and half online.  Even at 50% classroom capacity, we could offer 100% of our curriculum face-to-face.)

**To clarify, these assumptions allow us to plan. Formal guidance and constraints on Fall 2021 instruction will be provided by IDPH.**

Please plan now using the scenario outlined above.  If conditions are worse than expected, we can move more sections to remote instruction as late as August 1, 2021.  If conditions continue to improve rapidly, we could contemplate a move of some courses – as allowed by the Class Schedule – to full classroom capacity.  We do not anticipate rebuilding the Class Schedule or asking students to re-register.

As you construct your class schedule for the fall semester, please prioritize classes that benefit most from in-person instruction.  This should include courses that have a major “hands-on” component (e.g., performance, studio, lab courses); courses required for progression/graduation; courses known to be a challenge or limitation to student success in online delivery format; and courses for first- and second-year students. We encourage you to creatively think about how to maximize the use of space to enhance the student experience. The appended document provides more information and examples for planning purposes.  Although the capacity constraints listed above do limit classroom inventory, we anticipate a significant number of additional classrooms coming online in the Fall 2021 semester that will help alleviate space limitations.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us with questions or concerns about the planning and construction of the Class Schedule.  As this effort progresses, we will be working with colleges and departments to ensure that course modality and instruction is aligned with the guidance outlined above.

Thanks for your help.

Regards,

Kristin McMurray