TUESDAY, SEPT. 29, 2020

Dear Faculty and Instructors,

As we plan for the Spring 2021 semester, I am writing to share important information about instructional planning. This information is meant to assist deans, department chairs, program leaders and instructors with a general set of guidelines for choosing instructional modalities, while also allowing flexibility to account for the needs of instructors, teaching assistants, departments, curricula and schools and colleges. This message includes an overview of:

- Overarching Principles and Assumptions
- Important Dates
- Guidelines for Choosing Instructional Modalities

Overarching Principles and Assumptions

Knowing that individual disciplines and courses may present different challenges and instructional considerations, we will rely on the judgment of deans and department chairs to plan for instruction that best meets the needs of our students, given the wide variety of considerations we face as part of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we have in the fall semester, we are operating under three overarching principles for the Spring 2021 semester:

1. We need to minimize risks related to public safety and health during the pandemic;
2. We need to maximize the student experience to enhance student success and retention; and
3. We need to accommodate faculty who have, or who cohabitate with those who have, significantly elevated risks from COVID-19.

For planning purposes, we are assuming that there will not be a widely available vaccine for SARS-CoV-2, that the pandemic situation in Central New York will be relatively consistent with the current status, and that the public health situation will allow us to provide in-person instruction. We will make necessary changes to these guidelines as the pandemic situation changes.

These guidelines also take into account what we have learned through feedback from faculty, staff, students and parents. We have a solid understanding about our ability to carry out testing and other public health measures, classroom space availability, HyFlex instruction, student preference, international student needs, technology, and the expectations of various stakeholders.

In particular, we learned that changes in teaching modalities after registration caused significant frustration among students and their parents —particularly when changes took place at the last minute or after the official start of the semester. We also learned that some students prefer in-person learning, others prefer synchronous online learning and yet some others prefer asynchronous online learning due to timing of the courses.

However, while the online option was available for all courses, in-person teaching was not available for many courses, resulting in frustration from students who felt that their preference could not be accommodated in the fall semester.

Important Dates

I want to share these important dates, which will help us provide students with critical information as they plan their spring schedules.

Oct. 15, 2020: Deans will work with department chairs to finalize faculty teaching responsibilities and course scheduling, and will report the instructional format of each course (fully in-person, hybrid/HyFlex or fully online) to Meg Cortese (**suscheduling@syr.edu**) and Associate Provost for Academic Affairs Chris Johnson (**cejohns@syr.edu**) **no later than Oct. 15, 2020.** Associate Provost Johnson will provide additional information on how to make this report in a separate document.

Oct. 15-29, 2020: While the spring schedule is finalized, transitions from

online to in-person/HyFlex teaching will be permitted if classrooms are available. **Transitions from in-person/HyFlex teaching to online teaching between Oct. 15-29 will require the approval of the appropriate dean.**

After Oct. 29, 2020: The completed spring schedule will be loaded into MySlice and ready for viewing the following week. Transitions from in-person/HyFlex teaching to online teaching after Oct. 29 **will require my approval.**

Nov. 15, 2020: Deans or their designees will communicate the teaching status of each member of their faculty to Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs LaVonda Reed (**lareed@syr.edu**) by Nov. 15, 2020.

Guidelines for Choosing Instructional Modalities

These guidelines begin with the assumption that faculty members are educators who seek to provide a high-quality student learning experience that includes a high level of faculty-student and student-student interactions. The general expectation is that faculty members will engage in in-person classroom instruction, assuming the availability of sufficient classroom space and that health concerns do not preclude in-person teaching.

Collectively, for each unit, school or college, it is expected that a substantial majority of courses will be taught with in-person instructional elements. When needed, schools and colleges are encouraged to take alternative approaches to increase the number of courses taught in person, including, but not limited to, assigning co-instructors for a course, seeking alternative teaching arrangements for current faculty, hiring adjunct faculty or postponing a course/teaching assignment to a later semester.

We also recognize that the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic present a number of priorities that may be difficult to reconcile and need to be prioritized based on the needs of programs, departments and schools and colleges, as well as faculty health concerns and challenges related to caregiving. We ask that deans, department chairs, program directors, faculty and instructors consider the following in planning for spring 2021:

- In smaller classes, we encourage faculty to offer in-person-only instruction (where all students attend in-person) if the classroom allows

for sufficient social distancing.

- We must continue to provide online access to enrolled students who have a new or ongoing health concern (e.g., quarantine or isolation) and to enrolled students who require online instruction because they are international or otherwise unable to make it to campus.

- For required classes with large enrollments (>80), departments are urged to consider providing dual "in-person-only" and "online-only" versions of these key courses if at all possible. Dual modalities will allow better alignment of student preference with teaching modalities. Department chairs should consider streamlining the portfolio of courses offered by their departments. Departments should also prioritize meeting the needs of first-year students for essential foundation courses and required courses needed for academic progress above a broad portfolio of electives.

- For courses where space constraints exist or students require online access that cannot be satisfied in other ways (e.g., international students attending online from outside the United States), in-person instruction should continue to rely on HyFlex teaching approaches, with improvements implemented to address some of the challenges noted from the fall semester:
  - Schools and colleges are encouraged to make available, upon request, classroom assistants to assist in managing HyFlex course delivery. The Office of Financial Aid is eager to help accommodate this need, and will cover 60 percent of the cost of the classroom assistant by undergraduates who are work-study eligible. Alternatively, schools and colleges may fund classroom assistants through other hourly arrangements with undergraduate or graduate students.

  - The University will continue to provide high-touch support to faculty preparing spring courses for HyFlex and fully online formats, please contact the **Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence** to begin spring course planning and learn about resources that are available for faculty and instructors.

- Because COVID-19 health risks vary based on age; pre-existing health conditions, including a compromised immune system; and other factors, the University will continue to provide accommodations for teaching

online to individuals with significantly elevated risk, and those who cohabitate with someone with significantly elevated risk. Faculty members will finalize such decisions in discussion with their school/college dean, department chair or the dean's designee. Deans and department chairs are also encouraged to work with faculty to provide flexibility in course scheduling for faculty who have caregiving responsibilities that impact their availability.

- When requested by the department chair or the dean of the school/college, faculty who agree to teach two sections of a well-enrolled course, one in person and the other online, should be credited with teaching two courses toward their normal teaching load.

In closing, I recognize that choosing teaching modalities is complex and must take into account multiple considerations and the needs of many stakeholders, and I hope that these guidelines are understood as considerations that should be taken into account in decision-making, recognizing that there will be times when it is not possible to meet every individual need.

I have confidence that our deans, department chairs, program directors and faculty can work together for a successful spring semester. We ask that you keep the lines of communication open and these important dates in mind as you plan for the spring. Associate Provost Johnson (**cejohns@syr.edu**) can help with questions and problem-solving regarding classrooms and curriculum. Associate Provost Reed (**lareed@syr.edu**) and her team in faculty affairs can assist with questions about faculty and instructor needs.

Thank you for everything that you do every day to enrich and support Syracuse University students.

Sincerely,

John Liu
Interim Vice Chancellor and Provost

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