

Interoffice Communication

Date: June 17, 2020

To: Faculty and Staff in the Division of Academic Affairs

From: Jonathan Wickert
Senior Vice President and Provost 

Subject: Planning for Fall 2020 Instruction (SVPP COVID-19 Communication #12)

I am writing with additional information about instruction during the fall 2020 semester based on President Wintersteen's [announcements](#) last week regarding the university's continuing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, I want to acknowledge the significant level of uncertainty, and even anxiety, that exists for faculty preparing to teach in the fall. In writing this memo, I am sharing the most current information, but I know that it won't answer all of your questions, including some of those submitted during last Friday's [town hall](#). Nor will this communication address all of your concerns. As the university develops, iterates, and refines plans for the fall, we will continue to seek your feedback and work with the Faculty Senate, deans, and department chairs to communicate plans to you as soon as they are known.

Changes to the academic calendar

Our goals for the fall semester have not changed: We will prioritize the safety of our university community; we will help students make progress toward their degrees; and we will conduct Iowa State's mission-oriented and operational functions as effectively as possible.

The fall semester will begin one week earlier than usual, and additionally, the semester's length will be shortened by one week. Fall classes will begin on Monday, August 17, and the last day of instruction will be Friday, November 20. There will be 14 weeks of instruction followed by 4 days of examinations, a schedule that meets federal requirements for a full semester.

Final examinations will be scheduled for Saturday, November 21, through Wednesday, November 25, but no exams will be held on Sunday, November 22. This schedule enables coursework and final exams to be completed on-site before students leave for winter break,

thereby both promoting student learning and reducing travel to and from campus in the latter part of the semester and during flu season.

The standard policies for Prep Week (formerly named Dead Week) will be in place during November 16-20, including: regular lectures are expected to continue, new content can be taught, and no in-class quizzes or exams may be given on that Thursday or Friday.

I appreciate the Executive Board of the Faculty Senate endorsing adjustments to the university's "Calendar Principles for Academic Years 2015-2016 through 2020-2021" in support of the alternative fall calendar.

Other key dates include:

- Class lists will be available on AccessPlus beginning Sunday, July 26.
- The last day for students to make schedule changes to full-semester classes without instructor and/or adviser approval will be Friday, August 21.
- Midterm grade reporting will open on Saturday, September 26, and the deadline for submitting midterm grades will be 2:15 p.m. on Friday, October 9.
- Midterm grades will be available to students on AccessPlus beginning Saturday, October 10.
- The last day to drop a full-semester course will be Friday, October 23.
- The final grade submission deadline will be 2:15 p.m. on Wednesday, December 9.
- Academic advising for spring semester 2021 will begin on Monday, September 28, with registration opening to students on Wednesday, October 7.

Additional dates and deadlines continue to be determined and will be published soon.

Faculty appointments

Even though the fall academic calendar has changed, the conditions of faculty appointments and contracts have not. Nine-month faculty have responsibilities that begin two days prior to the start of the semester. For the upcoming semester, the intent of the policy remains the same, but instruction will start earlier by one week and end earlier by two weeks. The pay period does not change, and payroll continues through the month of December.

The change in the academic calendar does mean that faculty will have responsibilities during the week of Thanksgiving. Despite there being no instructional duties in December beyond submission of final grades, regular departmental business and other faculty responsibilities are expected to continue as best as possible through December 16, one week beyond final grade submission.

Returning to the classroom

For many faculty, the opportunity to return to their classrooms in the fall is a welcome and anticipated development. For those at high risk for COVID-19 as defined by the Centers for Disease Control, returning to the classroom is an unacceptable risk, and they should follow the guidance on [alternative work arrangements](#) from University Human Resources. Still other faculty may have concerns about returning to in-person instruction, or may be uncertain until additional information and resources are available.

As you read in last week's letter from President Wintersteen, Iowa State has launched a comprehensive campaign, Cyclones Care, to encourage students, faculty, and staff to practice healthy behaviors both on and off campus, including wearing face coverings, physical distancing, hand washing, and staying home when sick. Together, these measures will offer a solid approach for our campus to successfully, and safely, navigate the fall semester. As a campus, while we cannot eliminate all risks associated with the pandemic, we are basing decisions on science and public health guidance, and our plans may be refined as new information becomes available and/or circumstances change.

While no instructor will be forced to teach in-person classes, it is appropriate to remind ourselves that the hallmark of Iowa State's academic experience is a rich, on-campus environment that includes world-class instruction, blending practical and critical thinking skills, as well as high-impact experiential learning opportunities that prepare students to succeed after graduation.

At the core of this ideal is the engagement between students and faculty, who spur creativity and innovation in their assigned coursework, provide opportunities for research and extension service, and who serve as mentors throughout – and sometimes even beyond – students' time on campus.

That is why students prefer an on-campus experience for the fall. They place a great value not only on their interactions with faculty in the classroom, but also their interactions in advising appointments, during office hours, and through faculty service to student organizations. Some students are likely to take a gap year, or seek an alternative closer to home, rather than enroll in a substantial number of online courses. Such a scenario would result in lower enrollments, and negatively impact the university's academic mission for years to come.

As we make decisions about how best to safely serve students in the fall, please be assured that we are all in this together – and we will get through this together. In the meantime, I hope faculty will continue to offer their feedback on how we can support their efforts.

For these reasons, I have asked all academic departments to review their class schedules with a fresh view in order to match faculty interests and teaching expertise, the needs of our students, and instructional modality. The goal of each department should be to meet the expectations of students who desire meaningful and safe in-person learning experiences. As decisions and trade-offs are made, I ask that particular attention be given to the quality of first-year learning as students begin their education at Iowa State University, and to experiential learning courses. Both are hallmarks of our residential campus.

Course delivery

Although there is no “one size fits all” approach, the preferred mode for delivering courses this fall will vary according to course type, pedagogical model, and enrollment.

- Large lecture-based classes will be online and supplemented by in-person recitation sessions or small group learning opportunities, which can be delivered either in-person or synchronously virtual, at least once a week. In this manner, students will benefit by interacting with instructors, discussing course material, and asking questions.
- Medium and small lecture-based classes, studios, capstone, and team-based learning courses will be taught in-person, or in blended formats as appropriate, utilizing safety measures for all in-person sessions. Blended instruction uses a combination of in-person

and online instruction modalities, and is a useful approach to promote safety, flexibility, and instructional goals.

- Laboratory courses with fixed spaces and specialized equipment will be offered in-person and will include appropriate safety measures. Those not requiring fixed spaces or specialized equipment may be offered in blended formats, again utilizing safety measures for the in-person sessions.
- Courses that need to be taught in a specific manner to comply with accreditation guidelines may use in-person instruction, following appropriate safety measures, and following other guidelines as provided by the respective accrediting body.

There may be exceptions within this framework, and I have delegated such exceptions to college deans.

College associate deans will coordinate with academic departments to review, modify as appropriate, and approve all course delivery modalities based on both college and university priorities. In some cases, it might be temporarily necessary to modify a course, or waive a graduation or major requirement. Any such changes to schedules, courses, or requirements should be transparent and fair to faculty, and should not disadvantage the academic progress of students.

Likewise, college associate deans will assist department chairs with decision-making regarding faculty teaching assignments. Some faculty will be asked to teach courses beyond their usual assignments; others will be asked to teach courses using a different modality or class/section size. In this disruptive period, I appreciate your continuing flexibility and willingness to extend a helping hand to your colleagues as we work to meet the needs and expectations of students.

Changes to class times

To ease congestion, passing times between classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays will be extended from the usual 10 minutes to 15 minutes. This change will enable more orderly classroom and building ingress and egress, and promote greater physical distancing for students and instructors as they make their ways across campus. The 50-minute class length will not change on those days. However, the starting and ending times of classes will change as follows:

Originally scheduled times	New times
MWF 8:00-8:50	MWF 7:45-8:35
MWF 9:00-9:50	MWF 8:50-9:40
MWF 10:00-10:50	MWF 9:55-10:45
MWF 11:00-11:50	MWF 11:00-11:50
MWF 12:10-1:00	MWF 12:05-12:55
MWF 1:10-2:00	MWF 1:10-2:00
MWF 2:10-3:00	MWF 2:15-3:05
MWF 3:10-4:00	MWF 3:20-4:10
MWF 4:10-5:00	MWF 4:25-5:15
MWF 5:10-6:00	MWF 5:30-6:20

The teaching schedule and passing times between classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays will not change, but classes on those days will be scheduled for 75 minutes.

Class times in the College of Veterinary Medicine may follow a different schedule to reflect the instructional model used with professional students.

Additional information about class scheduling will be forthcoming from the Registrar's Office and FP&M Room Scheduling in the coming weeks.

Instruction and student support services on Labor Day

The university will be open on Labor Day (Monday, September 7) for instruction, student support services, and other functions. Classes, laboratories, and studios will meet, and students are expected to participate as they would on any other day of the semester.

Instruction and student support services on Labor Day strengthen the university's response to the pandemic in several ways: likely reducing the amount of student travel that weekend; providing an additional in-person instructional day at the beginning of the semester, which would be useful should we need to shift to virtual instruction later in the term, as the pandemic's conditions may warrant; and resulting in only four (rather than five) fewer days of instruction, thereby providing value to students and supporting academic continuity.

Faculty and staff in the Division of Academic Affairs who have instructional responsibilities on Labor Day (including preparation, teaching, laboratory set-up or take-down, and office hours), or student support service responsibilities (such as scheduled meetings with students for academic advising and financial aid counseling), are expected to work on Labor Day to carry out only those duties. Staff members should work with their supervisors to determine if they are expected to work on Labor Day.

Faculty and exempt staff members who work on Labor Day will be provided time-off (the prorated portion of a full day based on full-time equivalent status) to be used before December 31, 2020, on a date that does not impact their responsibilities. The university will follow regular holiday pay practices for non-exempt staff.

Faculty and staff in the Division of Academic Affairs who are not engaged in teaching or student support services regularly scheduled on Mondays are not expected to work on Labor Day. Those faculty and exempt staff should take that day off, and therefore will not receive additional time off.

University Human Resources will provide additional guidance in the near future.

Field trips

The transportation logistics and the site visits themselves for class field trips will be reviewed, approved, modified, or denied on a case-by-case basis at the college level, taking into account such factors as pedagogical value, risk management, and safety protocols. In compliance with Board of Regents and State of Iowa policies, the university could have travel restrictions in place for some or all of the fall semester. Because policy permitting or restricting travel may change with little or no advance notice, please plan alternatives and contingencies for fall field trips.

Instructional support

All courses for the fall semester are required to be developed within Canvas. Because our online presence this fall will be larger than usual, I recommend instructors use the [ISU course template](#), which contains all essential components for a high-quality online course. Consistent use of this template across campus will improve the overall experience for students and ensure that best practices for online teaching are implemented in all of our courses.

To support faculty in developing online, blended, and in-person courses, the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) provides the course template through [Online Course Essentials](#). Individuals, as well as entire departments, can sign up for training.

CELT will offer a variety of professional development programming for faculty throughout the summer and fall, including:

- Summer Course Design Institute
- Concise 30-minute sessions that focus on instructional strategies and ways to use Canvas
- A teaching and learning circle focused on developing and teaching a hybrid course
- An online team-based learning program
- Quality Matters programming to improve online courses
- Workshops about teaching online, engagement strategies, and equitable and inclusive teaching practices.

Classroom, laboratory, and studio safety

Classroom density will be reduced by limiting in-person class sizes to 50% of a classroom's normal instructional capacity. (Please note the distinction from fire-code capacity.) This reduction applies to all laboratory- and studio-based instruction, as well.

In some experiential learning courses, it may not be possible to adhere to the 50% guideline. I have delegated case-by-case exceptions to college deans, with the requirement that additional measures be employed to promote the safety of students and instructors.

Face coverings are an important part of the university's COVID-19 mitigation strategy, and I want to thank all who have provided feedback and recommendations pertaining to the obligation for students and employees to wear a face covering. This issue is being studied by the Fall Planning Executive Committee, and the university's decisions continue to be refined. A working group that includes faculty and student affairs representatives is currently evaluating options for enforcement. A communications team is consulting with faculty experts to develop an education and social responsibility campaign focused on encouraging personal responsibility to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Two face coverings will be provided to every faculty and staff member, and student, prior to classes resuming in the fall. The university's goal is to have the necessary tools in place so that clear direction exists regarding when and where face coverings are required so that faculty and staff can effectively manage this issue in their classrooms and work areas.

In addition to face coverings, such other risk-mitigation strategies as enhanced cleaning, more frequent cleaning, additional space at the front of a classroom, the use of plexiglass panels, and new protocols for entering and exiting classrooms will be employed. The specific risk-mitigation approaches to be taken will depend on courses and the configurations of classroom

spaces. With support from college administration and central university guidance, academic departments will make local decisions for department-controlled classrooms, and central decisions will be made for university-controlled classrooms.

FP&M is expanding its custodial staff and pursuing additional approaches to increase cleaning capacity on campus.

Graduate assistants

The changes to the fall 2020 academic calendar will not affect the stipends of graduate students who are appointed to assistantships. The appointments of international students who graduate in fall 2020 must end by the last day of the semester, November 25. Some appointments already processed through the Graduate College include less than a full monthly stipend for August. Because instruction begins earlier this year, appointing units have the option to adjust those appointments to increase the fraction of the total term stipend dispersed in August. Please contact Lynette McBirnie-Sprecher (mcbirnie@iastate.edu) in the Graduate College for assistance.

Teaching assistants who normally perform instructional or student support service duties on Mondays are expected to do so on Labor Day. Supervisors have flexibility to adjust the schedules of individual teaching, research, and administrative graduate assistants.

Additional information on assistantship appointments will be distributed soon by the Graduate College.

Absence due to illness and back-up instructors

Faculty who are ill are never expected to work. University policy provides sick leave accrual for all employees, and sick leave should be used for those day(s) when a faculty or staff member is unable to work due to illness. For information specific to COVID-19 related illness, isolation, or quarantine, please see the [guidance](#) provided by University Human Resources.

Department chairs, in communication and coordination with faculty, should identify back-up instructors and prepare continuity plans in the event of a significant outbreak in the fall. By including back-up instructors in their respective Canvas classes, departments can facilitate substituting instructors for a course should that become necessary. Some departments are creating thematic teams of faculty, who are familiar with content in a set of courses, so that team members are prepared to step-in if needed. In other cases, the back-up instructor would likely be an experienced faculty member who has previously taught the course, or who is currently teaching another section of it. As planning continues, it will be important for departments to approach this contingency process equitably and in a manner that respects faculty workload, and particularly so for early-career faculty.

Additional updates

- I ask faculty to review their course syllabi to ensure class requirements and policies are up-to-date and reflective of changes for the fall. It will be particularly important to highlight class-disruption policies, and to explain how risky health-related behaviors could undermine others' full participation in class. Faculty may also choose to be more flexible on attendance policies and deadlines as circumstances warrant.

- The Commencement Advisory Committee is exploring options for fall commencement and college convocations, including a review of spring’s virtual commencement and an analysis of capacity and safety options for in-person events, if warranted.
- The temporary tenure clock extension policy announced in the spring continues to be in place. A one-time, one-year extension will be approved for any faculty member who requests one because their work has been disrupted by COVID-19.
- The temporary Pass/Not Pass (P/NP) policies applied only to spring courses and are no longer in effect. Fall (and summer) instruction will proceed according to the university’s usual policies. Undergraduate students continue to be able to complete a maximum of 9 credits on P/NP basis; any courses taken as P/NP during the spring semester do not count against that limit. Graduate students may seek permission to take courses on a P/NP basis this fall, but those courses may not appear on the program of study. Of course, should circumstances in the fall warrant, the need for temporary P/NP policies can be revisited in consultation with the Faculty Senate.
- In addition to previously announced diversity, equity, and inclusion training, the fall training for college promotion and tenure committees will include awareness-raising on how the pandemic may have impacted faculty teaching, scholarship, and productivity.
- CELT’s Inclusive Classroom Workshops were completed in 41 academic departments during the spring semester, reaching over 1,000 faculty, before they were paused due to the pandemic. Plans are being developed to offer the workshops to the remaining 18 departments in the coming academic year, either in-person or virtually.
- My office will work with the Faculty Senate, department chairs, deans, and student leaders to determine an appropriate approach for fall course evaluations.

Thank you

I want to thank you, sincerely, for your adaptation, resilience, and passion for serving our students and promoting Iowa State’s mission. I very much look forward to seeing you back on campus—safely—in the fall.

JAW/jj

C: Wendy Wintersteen, President
 Pam Cain, Interim Senior Vice President for Operations and Finance
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 Provost’s Council
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