

Fall 2021 Academic Planning Group Report **April 26, 2021**

Committee Charge

In March of 2021, the Academic Planning group reconvened to plan for the University's transition back to post-pandemic instruction. Interim Provost John Liu charged the planning group with framing a set of operating assumptions and drafting recommendations for main campus academic activities for fall 2021, encompassing considerations for both faculty and students.

Background

With extensive input from faculty, staff, and students, the Fall 2020 Academic Planning group helped to establish Syracuse University's framework for implementing modified academic operational plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience of transitioning first to all online (Spring, 2020), then to both online and hybrid instruction (fall, 2020), and finally to a mix of in-person, hybrid and online classes (spring, 2021) was challenging, but provided quality instruction and progress toward degree completion for both undergraduate and graduate students.

This academic year has stretched faculty, graduate instructors and staff well beyond normal obligations and expectations. Thanks to their care, creativity, flexibility and innovation during a difficult academic year, the university was able to meet the needs of students studying in Syracuse and around the world. In doing so, faculty, graduate instructors, and staff learned a great deal about the use of online tools to enhance active learning strategies during synchronous class meetings. In addition to managing the challenges of different instructional modalities and the increased workload resulting from hybrid instruction, faculty and staff have supported students in innumerable ways, both inside and outside of the classroom. Faculty have responded to historic and often tragic events by offering their expertise through panels, programs, teach-ins and individual interaction with students who are struggling to understand and respond. Under the most challenging of circumstances, our faculty distinguished themselves as creative teachers and thoughtful mentors of our students.

The recommendations outlined in this report are grounded in a recognition that faculty have the best interest of students in mind and that departments can offer courses in the modalities that best meet strategic program and pedagogical goals within the normal parameters of academic freedom and shared governance.

Planning Assumptions. In the group's deliberations for fall 2021 planning, the discussions were framed with the following assumptions in place:

- Final plans will always be contingent on public health conditions and informed by regulations provided by state, county and municipal governments.
- For the summer terms, we assume for now that instructional planning will be subject to the same social distancing and masking requirements as were in place for the current academic year.
- The University will resume in-person residential instruction in the fall semester in a manner that closely resembles our pre-pandemic mode of residential operation.
- All faculty and staff will have had the opportunity to be vaccinated, and nearly all will have completed the vaccination process.
- All undergraduate and graduate students will be eligible to receive the vaccine and most will have been vaccinated.

- Social distancing requirements will be relaxed, permitting 100% occupancy of classroom spaces for fall.
- Masking may continue to be required in classrooms and indoor spaces.
- The post-pandemic “normal” may not be exactly the same as before the pandemic. Thoughtful deliberation and strategic adaptation to a new post-pandemic normal is in the best interest of the University.

Consideration for International Students

Despite the optimistic outlook for a successful return to a fully in-person fall residential semester, the university faces continued challenges in meeting the instructional needs of international students who have not yet secured a student visa to enter the United States. There is a possibility that some of our new and continuing international students, especially from China, may not be successful in securing a student visa in time to begin residential study this fall. Newly admitted students from China are of most concern, as are rising sophomores, many of whom started with one or two in-person semesters at our Syracuse in Shanghai program (in partnership with CIEE/East China Normal University) or at Syracuse@Southwest University in Chongqing.

Syracuse Abroad is leading a working group to create residential in-person opportunities for undergraduate students in China, working closely with the College of Arts and Sciences and the Maxwell School to make online Syracuse University course offerings available to all affected students. The working group is collaborating with Admissions and the Center for International Services to communicate with students about these offerings.

Other in-person or fully online options for international students who are not be able to return to campus are being addressed by individual schools and colleges. For example, the School of Architecture has created in-person programs at three locations in China. A number of programs are considering options for offering online sections of high-demand courses to fulfill this need.

Recommendations

Discussions with the Provost’s team, the Fall 2021 Planning Group co-leads, the Fall 2021 Planning Committee, the Graduate Faculty Council, and the Academic Affairs Committee of the University Senate yielded the following recommendations:

- 1) Vaccination Policy. To ensure a safe return to in-person campus operations, Syracuse University should require COVID-19 vaccination for all new and returning students. A similar requirement should be applied for faculty and staff. Appropriate medical and religious exceptions will provide a basis for exclusion from the vaccination requirement. International students traveling to campus from outside of the United States and who have not yet been vaccinated will need to allow ample time (approximately 3 weeks) prior to the start of the term to receive the vaccine and achieve full immunity. The university must still clarify whether verified vaccination reports received by students from their home countries can serve as proof of immunization or whether booster shots of an FDA-approved vaccine will be required.
- 2) Return to fully in-person instruction. Residential instruction is a critical dimension of Syracuse University’s academic mission. As such, the default expectation for fall is that courses that enroll main campus, residential students will primarily be taught in person. This does not preclude

individual faculty from selectively utilizing online instructional materials and teaching methods to enhance their in-person courses.

- 3) Approved listing of courses as online or hybrid. Syracuse University's footprint of high-quality online programs continues to grow. Moreover, the pandemic itself has introduced transformative change in the application of digital tools to support active learning. Looking towards fall 2021 and beyond, it is understood that online instruction may confer advantages to main campus residential students in certain circumstances. Decisions regarding course modality involve pedagogical considerations. As such, determinations about the listing of a limited number of courses as online or hybrid should be made by faculty and department chairs in consultation with their school or college dean and with consideration of the department's curricular priorities.

As we emerge from the pandemic, approval of the appropriate Dean (or the Dean's designee) and the Provost will continue to be required for main-campus classes that employ online-only and hybrid modes of instruction. Approvals will be granted based on strategic considerations as outlined above. These may include situations where multiple sections of a course are offered; as an efficient alternative for students who must repeat a course; as an option for matriculated international students who are temporarily delayed in securing a student visa; for main-campus courses that are known to be taken remotely by students in our centers in Los Angeles, New York, Washington and abroad; and for emergencies requiring a last-minute change in instructor.

- 4) Use of online tools to enhance the in-person student learning experience. In addition to offering a small subset of main-campus courses using online or hybrid teaching modes, it is also understood that fully in-person courses may benefit from the integration of online tools. Twelve months of online and hybrid teaching have generated many valuable instructional methods, approaches and course structures as the result of the outstanding work of the faculty. Faculty are encouraged to take some of the best aspects of our experiences and carry them forward in ways that strengthen the residential student experience. Faculty may integrate the use of online tools to enhance the effectiveness and/or efficiencies of active learning opportunities for in-person classes. For example, faculty may find it useful to deploy limited asynchronous online content to free up in-person classroom time for discussion or other active learning opportunities. Faculty are also encouraged to use online tools to connect students to experts across the world, including in many instances our alumni, who can contribute to student development, learning, and success. Faculty are encouraged to discuss their ideas with department chairs, colleagues and college leadership. The [Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence](#) is a valuable resource for faculty wishing to explore ways in which to incorporate online tools in their classes.
- 5) Expectations for residential students: The current academic year has, by necessity, involved flexibility in terms of mode of instruction. Students were able to choose their mode of instruction during class selection. For fall 2021, the expectation will be that matriculated residential students will come to campus and attend classes in person except in extraordinary circumstances. As in pre-pandemic times, students with specific disability-related concerns may request an accommodation through the Center for Disability Resources. Of note, residential students will, on a limited basis, still be able to take courses listed as online or hybrid, but the vast majority of course offering will be in-person only. Course modality will be clearly indicated in MySlice so that students understand how the course they are selecting will be offered.

- 6) Expectations for faculty. For the current academic year, at-risk faculty were given the opportunity to select the mode of instruction for their classes and, by necessity, many faculty members worked from home. For fall 2021, we will return to the pre-pandemic operating assumptions for on-campus faculty work as outlined in the faculty manual. With widespread availability of highly effective vaccines for faculty and students, faculty will be expected to be present on campus to teach in-person courses, conduct research, and engage in university-related service activities. As has always been the case before the pandemic, faculty who have a chronic health condition, or other disability that impacts their capacity to perform an essential job function may request a disability accommodation from the accommodation specialist at ada@syr.edu. The expectation that faculty be present on campus for work does not preclude the integration of online teaching for in-person courses or the use of use of online platforms to conduct remote meetings for service or research-related activities. Moreover, faculty may teach a course that is listed as fully online or hybrid with appropriate approvals from the relevant dean and provost, teaching. As noted above, decisions surrounding course modality for the fall 2021 should be made based on the curricular priorities of the department.

Academic Planning Group Membership

John Liu (lead) Interim Vice Chancellor and Provost

Michael Frasciello (co-lead) Dean of University College

Chris Johnson (co-lead) Associate Provost for Academic Affairs

Marcelle Haddix (co-lead) Dean's Professor, Reading and Language Arts Department Chair and Co-Director of the Lender Center for Social Justice in the School of Education

Peter Vanable (co-lead) Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate School

Lois Agnew Associate Dean for Curriculum Innovation and Pedagogy in the College of Arts and Sciences

Amber Bartosh Assistant Professor in the School of Architecture

Kelly Campbell, University Registrar

Kelly Chandler-Olcott Meredith Professor for Teaching Excellence in the Department of Reading and Language Arts in the School of Education

Meg Cortese Assistant Registrar

Vennie Cowart Professor of Practice in the Falk College

Chris Danek Assistant Director of Space Management, Campus Planning, Design and Construction

Martha Diede Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence in the Office of the Provost

Scott Erdman Associate Professor and Interim Associate Chair of the Department of Biology in the College of Arts and Sciences

Bruce Kingma Professor in the School of Information Studies and Whitman School

Aileen Gallagher Associate Professor of Magazine, News and Digital Journalism in the Newhouse School

Jenny Gluck Associate Chief Information Officer for Academic Services, Information Technology Services

Suzette Melendez Teaching Professor, Director of the Children's Rights and Family Law Clinic and Faculty Director of Inclusion Initiatives in the College of Law

Alan Middleton Associate Dean of Research and Scholarship and Professor of Physics in the College of Arts and Sciences

Lindsay Quilty Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Programs in the Whitman School

Steve Schaffling Assistant Dean of Student Success in the College of Arts and Sciences

J. Cole Smith Dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science

Michael Tick Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts

David Van Slyke Dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs