

Wednesday, June 10, 2020 (8:24 am)

– Message from Provost Taber: Update on our academic instruction planning for fall 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Please see below a note from Provost Taber with information on academic instruction planning for Fall 2020 as well as the recommendations from the Academic Instruction Working Group.

Thanks,

Mindy

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Dear colleagues,

I am writing with an update on the progress of our planning efforts for a successful return to our campuses in August. While our return to campus will look and feel much different than the past, we will continue to find innovative ways to advance our academic, research, outreach and engagement mission in the COVID-19 era.

Several teams and working groups are addressing topics to inform our planning for the fall semester. Last week, I met with the [Academic Instruction Working Group](#) and discussed their recommendations for returning to the classroom this fall. Their recommendations fall into two general categories – health and safety concerns and teaching and instruction. I have attached their recommendations here and invite you to share your feedback and additional suggestions with me and the working group co-chairs, Brian Niehoff (niehoff@ksu.edu) and Karen Pedersen (karenpedersen@ksu.edu). I am grateful for the working group's diligent

efforts and thoughtful consideration of a multitude of issues that will impact the health and safety of our students, faculty, GTAs, staff, and communities. This group continues to meet and advance additional recommendations and strategies.

We have made progress on two important topics impacting our fall semester plans – an adjustment to our academic calendar and residence hall and dining center plans for residential students. As announced in K-State Today this week, the start and end dates of the fall semester will be moved up by one week with classes beginning on August 17. You can read about the fall Housing and Dining plans here.

There remains much work to do to prepare for a COVID-ready academic instruction plan and campus experience. Three priority issues in the coming weeks include planning and preparation of our learning spaces in the areas of technology, seating capacity, and ventilation. We are continuing to establish aggressive deadlines, conduct analysis, collect input, and move forward as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your support and patience while we collaborate to create the conditions for a healthy, safe, and productive fall semester.

Stay safe and be well,
Chuck

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Charles Taber
Provost and Executive Vice President
Professor of Political Science
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**Academic Instruction Working Group
Final Recommendations for Provost
May 29, 2020**

Charge

The Academic Instruction Working Group was charged to do the following:

Provide recommendations for an academic instruction model for the next academic year that:

1. continues to protect the health and safety of students, faculty, GTAs, staff and our communities;
2. maintains high quality learning environments for students;
3. balances the needs of students and those of faculty/GTAs;
4. is quickly adaptable to respond to changing conditions related to COVID-19.

Foundations and Assumptions:

Given that the university has committed to having students back on campus in Fall 2020, the group discussed a number of points that were not so much recommendations as they were basic foundations or assumptions. These fall into two general categories – those related to health and safety concerns and those related to teaching and instruction:

Health and Safety Foundations:

1. The university will **continue to monitor and follow CDC, state and county guidance** as well as scientific research and make adjustments to plans accordingly including issues of:
 - Quarantine options for students prior to the start of the semester or during the semester;
 - Testing and contact tracing before and during the semester;
 - Ensuring local health officials develop protocols for the handling of positive cases that occur on any of the campuses during the semester;
 - Keeping buildings and rooms clean in accordance to CDC guidelines in coordination with Facilities;
 - Reviewing ventilation in buildings/rooms as necessary.
2. **The university will establish a general communication regarding the wearing of face coverings.** The group recommends that all faculty, GTAs, staff and students should be expected to wear masks/face coverings when social distancing is not possible, especially inside buildings, during changes of classes and in classrooms. When social distancing is possible, masks/face coverings do not need to be worn. When faculty/GTAs are teaching, they can use their own comfort level to determine if wearing a face covering is feasible. In addition, all should be encouraged to complete the training on the use of masks and face coverings located on the COVID-19 website.
3. **Social distancing will still be required**, necessitating classroom/lab/learning space adjustments or modifications in how many students attend class each day:
 - COVID-19 room capacities will be determined for existing classrooms;

- Larger spaces on campus (e.g., McCain, Alumni Center ballroom, Forum Hall, Union Ballroom, Bramlage, All Faiths Chapel) will be pursued as classroom spaces to potentially house larger classes and allow for social distancing.
4. **Guidelines should be developed for dealing with classroom flow issues** such as entering and exiting rooms, use of elevators or stairs and other areas where individuals might congregate before or after class. With the potential flow of people, it will be important to clarify what role faculty, staff or students have in assisting.
 5. **Supplies of hand sanitizer, wipes for different types of surfaces including electronics and extra trashcans** will be available in multiple places in each building (preferably within each classroom). Also, it will be important to clarify who will be responsible for the cost of those items in each building.
 6. **A culture of cleaning should be developed across the university**, with students and faculty/GTAs cleaning workspaces at the beginning of each class with no change to the start or end times of classes.
 - The university will continue to monitor CDC guidance on virus spread specifically on surfaces and adjust accordingly.
 7. The continued **health and safety of the K-State community** is of the utmost importance.
 - Flexibility, compassion, and accommodation will be provided for students and faculty/GTAs who are quarantined or get sick with COVID-19.
 - Student Life will develop protocols for students to follow if they show symptoms of COVID-19. When notified, faculty/GTAs should consider such situations as a University Excused Absence.
 - For faculty/GTAs, the college/department will need to determine strategies to apply if someone becomes ill for an extended time.
 - Mental health concerns of students, as well as faculty and staff, should be a high priority with a move back to on-campus operations. Trauma-informed pedagogy, mental health services (e.g., Family Center, Counseling Services) and the optional mental health syllabus statement should be considered in planning efforts.
 - o Faculty would appreciate additional guidance on how they can assist. This would be a development opportunity for the campus.
 8. **Develop a set of health and safety guidelines** for all faculty, GTAs and staff, and for all students, that can be accessed before the start of the semester. Consider implementing a 'pledge' or 'promise' (similar to Purdue University) for students at the start of the semester.
 9. **Develop and communicate a university response plan** that will clarify what the university will do when there are spikes in cases or if someone tests positive in a class:
 - a. Follow CDC, state and county guidance to as the threshold of local incidence of COVID-19 triggering the pivot to online/remote only instruction campus-wide. Provide advanced warning that such a pivot would be necessary so faculty, GTAs, staff and students can prepare accordingly.
 - b. Local health officials will develop a means for tracking COVID-19 incidence among students that protects students' individual health status but provides information that offers transparency to the university community on a regular basis.

- c. Local health officials will develop protocols to implement if a COVID-19 case is confirmed in a particular class including whether the class should move online and whether the students/instructor in the class should be quarantined.

Teaching and Instruction Foundations:

1. **All efforts should be made to maintain and assess all learning outcomes and quality standards for all classes no matter the delivery mode** (face-to-face, blended/hybrid or online). While it is important to maintain the learning outcomes and meet the standards for the stated credit hours for each class in addition to ensuring regular and substantive student/instructor interaction, it is also understood that some classes have components that make it difficult to assess using identical means. Faculty/GTAs should make every effort to maintain consistency in learning and rigor across modes.
2. **Flexibility in teaching/learning approaches is essential** given the array of learning experiences offered at the university. There is no “one size fits all”, so colleges, departments and instructional faculty should have flexibility to structure classes in ways that make sense for their discipline. Flexibility could also be extended to capacity issues in classrooms where students and faculty/GTAs are required to wear full PPE (e.g., clinical environments, human body or similar) or to academic programs that must abide by federal regulations and are deemed “essential” by the federal government (e.g., pilot program).
3. **Faculty, GTAs and students must be prepared to pivot** if conditions change during the semester. See #9 above for additional information about university plans, scenarios or conditions for when a pivot would be needed.
4. **Add lecture record/Zoom capability to more classrooms.** The ability to pursue any strategy that restricts all students from being in the classroom at any one time and/or supports students who may be in quarantine is predicated on the instructor’s ability to record or live stream the class. Assess feasibility, timeline, costs and other considerations to expand university-wide capabilities.
5. **Academic access is a high priority.** With a focus on and dedication to providing equal opportunity and access for every student, continued collaboration with the Student Access Center is essential to ensure individual needs are met as decisions are made about course delivery modes.
6. **Focus on classrooms/labs/learning spaces** recognizing that not all activities and spaces can be controlled (e.g., Greek/scholarship houses, club/team meetings, study spaces, popular wi-fi spots, Union, rec facilities, apartments, yard parties, car trips, bars).
7. **Add delivery modality to all courses in KSIS** to provide transparency for stakeholders (e.g., students, instructors, GTAs, advisors).
8. **Seating charts** are encouraged for each class to reduce the within class contact and assist with contact tracing in the event of a confirmed case. Chairs could be numbered to assure that students sit in the same seat each class period.

Recommendations Concerning University-level Decisions:

(Note: The delivery mode of “Blended” entails a planned combination of some face-to-face components with online components. There is a wide range of how this could be done.)

1. **Colleges and departments start the semester with a mix of Face-to-Face (F2F), Blended, and Online classes, but remain ready to pivot to fully online/remote if needed:** An overarching philosophy to begin the semester with most classes in some form of F2F or blended modes, along with a portion of classes offered online from the start.
 - a. **F2F classes:** It should be recognized that, depending on the social distancing guidelines in place at the time, classroom capacities could be severely reduced to 1/3 to 1/2 normal capacity. This means that F2F classes will likely require alternating attendance policies for students or other means to accommodate all students, since all would not be able to attend class at the same time.
 - i. This situation would also require technology in the room that could record the class or allow live streaming via Zoom, so that those students not in attendance would have access to the in-class component.
 - b. **Being Strategic:** Departments and faculty/GTAs should consider a number of potential factors in determining which classes would be best taught F2F and which would be best in a blended mode (e.g., academic discipline, classroom availability, instructor considerations).
 - c. **Flexibility:** Departments and faculty/GTAs have the flexibility to determine which classes to offer F2F, blended or online and how to conduct their classes.
 - d. **Considerations:** While the university has committed to having as many classes in a F2F or blended mode as possible, it is recognized that faculty/GTAs who are in vulnerable groups and have concerns about being in a F2F classroom will have the option to teach online from the start of the semester.
2. **Early start, early ending to semester:** The University should consider starting the semester earlier than the Aug. 24th scheduled start date. This would allow an earlier end to the semester and prevent students having to return to campus after Thanksgiving. In this option, it is likely that finals would be held after Thanksgiving and completely online. There is general consensus among working group members that this option has merit to consider. It is recognized that an early start/early end could have impact on:
 - University calendaring (KBOR)
 - Financial aid
 - Veterans benefits
 - International students
 - Students completing internships
 - Off-campus housing availability/contracts
 - Other university/campus operations
 - Summer school and intersession completion
 - Concerns for childcare
 - Faculty preparation time

The working group acknowledges that other universities are considering this option, so reducing/eliminating impacts on the above should be manageable. The primary benefit of this option is that it reduces the amount of travel undertaken within the semester thus potentially mitigating virus spread. Fall commencement would need to be incorporated into the schedule prior to the semester end.

3. **University-wide policies:** All university policies that required a necessary shift or relaxation in the spring 2020 semester (e.g., change in A-Pass-Fail deadline) would return to standard implementation.

Recommendations for Faculty/Department/College-level Decisions:

- A. Based on academic discipline, classroom availability, instructor considerations and other relevant factors, decisions about individual classes should be at the discretion of the college/department, providing maximum flexibility.
- B. An extended course schedule would be completed by departments to ensure the planned delivery mode is captured in KSIS for transparency to the campus community.
- C. College and department planning should be within the context of the above university level decisions.

Options for colleges/departments to consider regarding fall course offerings:

1. **F2F classes** can be delivered as planned, keeping in mind the above foundations/assumptions. Faculty/GTAs will be required to set up alternating attendance strategies for students to keep capacity below COVID-19 capacities.
2. **Blended classes** can be deployed using a variety of blended learning approaches, while keeping in mind the above foundations/assumptions. Potential blended learning approaches include:
 - ***In-person driver*** (topics or content introduced F2F, with online used for practice or reinforcing learning);
 - ***Online driver*** (topics or content introduced online, with practice and reinforcement of learning in F2F mode);
 - ***Alternating or rotating class*** sessions (course is divided into parts that can be rotated in online or F2F delivery through the semester, such as project or group-based courses);
 - ***Hyflex*** (course is prepared in both F2F and online mode across all content, so that students can choose the mode that best fits their learning at any point in the course);
 - ***Additional options*** – It is recognized that the faculty, GTAs and departments may devise other methods to deliver courses in their discipline which do not fall neatly in any of the categories. There will be an allowance of flexibility afforded to departments and instructors to determine how to maintain the learning outcomes of courses while keeping in mind all of the above foundations/assumptions.
3. **Online** - Currently scheduled F2F classes can be moved online.

Implementation Planning:

We believe that there is a sense of urgency around communicating and executing the plan for the fall semester. The working group has identified six general areas that will be necessary to address as the university moves to implement this plan.

1. **Health and Safety Concerns** – It is assumed that the GPS group, working with the Executive team, will determine the university’s path forward regarding the health and safety issues noted in this document.
2. **Communicating the Academic Instruction Plan** – This involves communicating all facets of the above plan to the university community.
 - a. While it is advised that all university plans for the fall be released at the same time, the working group recognizes that the release of some information is more urgent to “calm the campus community.” Consideration should be given to providing some general information sooner rather than later.
 - b. The group also recognizes the urgency of the decisions for the fall plan, and that it would not be possible to vet the full plan through all of the shared governance bodies (e.g., Deans Council, President’s Cabinet, Faculty Senate, SGA, and USS Senate)
 - i. One suggestion is for central administration to release the plans all at once for comment from campus stakeholders for 2-3 days, then finalize the plans for release. This was a strategy used by the University of Kentucky.
 - c. It will be important to communicate the plan through all media so that it reaches all stakeholders.
 - d. There will be a need to be a process for responding to questions to clarify the plan or absorb any new ideas for the plan.
3. **Maximizing Classroom Usage** – This is an urgent need and involves locating spaces on campus that could be used for larger classrooms, including spaces in the Union, McCain, Alumni Center, All Faiths Chapel and Bramlage Coliseum. If these spaces can be used for face-to-face meetings for large classes, then those large classrooms can be used by others.
 - a. This is a very high priority process, as departments will need to know which classrooms they can use before deciding on how to offer the class (F2F, blended, online).
 - b. Facilities and the Registrar will need to determine the usability of larger spaces as well as COVID-19 capacities of all rooms.
 - c. The Registrar would need to develop a process for collecting information from colleges/departments and working with schedulers to move classes into larger spaces and larger classrooms.
4. **Upgrade Technology in Classrooms** – This step is urgent as well, because most classes will require technology to either record or live stream lectures for students who are unable to attend the classes. There are only about 20 centrally controlled classrooms on campus that are equipped for either recording or live streaming via Zoom.

- a. ITS will derive the costs for converting classrooms to appropriate technology (this step has already been completed);
 - b. ITS will work with the Registrar to determine prioritization for adding technology into classrooms. It is assumed that high use rooms would have higher priority.
 - c. ITS would work with their vendors to order and install technology in classrooms as can be afforded.
 - d. For departmentally controlled spaces, departments can work with ITS to assist in the determination of the technology needed, but the cost of the technology would be the responsibility of the department or college. Low cost technology, such as video recording equipment, can be a good substitute to more expensive Zoom or other technology.
5. **Faculty/GTA Development for Blended Classes** – With the switch to a majority of classes offered through a blended modality, there is a need to offer training for faculty and GTAs in areas that will help them succeed.
- a. The Teaching and Learning Center and Global Campus have already begun the development of a blended classroom series of workshops. These would be offered over the summer with continuing support into the fall semester.
 - b. Updated materials would also be made available on the “Keep Teaching” website.
6. **Semester Calendar Changes** – If the decision is made to move the start of the semester to an earlier date, with the ending of face-to-face classes by Thanksgiving, there are a number of processes that need to be approved. The KBOR President and Chair will need to approve the change. There are other processes that would need to be changed to accommodate a change to the calendar.
7. **Budget for Cleaning Classrooms and Buildings** – The plan calls for all classrooms to have cleaning supplies and additional trash cans. It will be necessary to determine who will pay these additional costs.