

Update on Fall 2021 Planning

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Dear University community members,

As I [announced several weeks ago](#), I recently charged a working group of faculty, staff, students and administrators to develop a set of recommendations for how we should approach course modalities and instruction next fall. The group has done important work in a short period of time. Today, I am eager to share their key recommendations and to inform you about the next steps as we seek to make course offerings as close to normal as possible next fall.

The working group was guided by a single goal — to make recommendations that would bring us as close to normal as possible. In their work, they aimed to balance a core set of values: health and safety, learning, accessibility and inclusion, equity and community. They considered what had worked well this year and where we could improve. And they worked to ensure they were making recommendations that could make the overall educational experience better for students and faculty.

Approved Recommendations

The working group developed a set of six recommendations. After additional consultation with our academic deans and Faculty Senate leaders, I have approved all six.

It is important to note that the first two recommendations are contingent on city, state and federal public health authorities reducing classroom social distancing protocols to 3 feet or less. Such changes will be influenced by broad vaccination adoption in our city and nation.

As Dr. Pestello has stated, near-universal vaccination adoption among our campus community members is critical if we want to experience a more normal fall semester. We expect revised public health guidance, especially linked to vaccinated persons, to be published in the coming weeks and months. If these revisions do not occur, the current limited classroom capacities will remain, and we will not have sufficient classroom space to implement the first two recommendations.

Regardless of classroom distancing expectations, we will move forward with items 3-6.

For all undergraduates — and most graduate and professional students — the following changes will be made for next year.

1. Assuming the social distancing safeguard is reduced by public health authorities to 3 feet or less, courses will be taught (and students will be expected to attend) in person, unless exceptions have been granted and/or a strategic decision has been made to offer specific courses online.
2. Again, assuming the social distancing safeguard is reduced by public health authorities to 3 feet or less, exception processes will be developed to accommodate instructors and students who have legitimate needs to remain *fully online* in fall 2021. These exceptions will be developed by one of the working groups described below.
3. In-person classes will no longer be required to offer an online, synchronous option for student participation/attendance.
4. We will take an individualized approach to accommodating students who are approved to be *fully online* in fall 2021. This means we will work with each student who is approved to be fully online to determine appropriate options for them to stay on track with their coursework, rather than defaulting to online participation in in-person classes.

5. Fully online courses will be expected to be offered asynchronously and meet the University's [Online Course Design standards](#). Note: peer review is optional.
6. We will create more consistency in classroom experiences and expectations by updating University-level COVID-19 course policies and developing a learning engagement guide to create common understanding for students and instructors.

These recommendations do not apply to students in the School for Professional Studies, who already learn fully online. The SLU-Madrid campus will need to tailor the recommendations to their particular context, as will the School of Law and possibly others.

Accrediting bodies may not allow exceptions for students to remain fully online or for programs to offer online courses, for instance. And courses that take place in more specialized spaces — labs, performance-based classes, and others — likely will continue to need their own specific guidelines for maintaining health and safety while also allowing for in-person learning.

Ultimately, I believe these steps will enhance educational quality, student success, and the overall academic experience, as well as foster community. To view the full report from the working group, [click here](#) (you must be logged into your SLU account to access the report).

Next Steps

I recognize that you likely still have many questions. And taking the steps described above will raise new questions. We have much to work through, such as how we can increase in-person offerings and how we will approach exceptions for those members of our community who truly need to be fully online again next fall.

To work through the logistics of implementing these new standards, I will charge several new working groups to implement these changes. I will work closely with our deans, associate and assistant deans, Faculty Senate and Student Government Association leaders, and my staff to ensure these working groups have the appropriate representatives to move the work forward as quickly as possible.

You can expect another update from me in the next week or so. We plan to update the community with additional information every 2-3 weeks.

I know how eager you are to have more concrete information about fall courses that might change as a result of these steps. I am, too.

I also am grateful to the members of the Fall 2021 Course Modality Working Group for developing thoughtful recommendations in a very short period of time.

Sincerely,

Mike Lewis, Ph.D.
Provost