

Fall 2020 Faculty Guidance

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Dear Faculty and staff colleagues,

As Dr. Pestello mentioned in [his message yesterday](#), we intend to be back on campus for the fall term, though it will not be business as usual.

In working toward our collective goal of making the fall semester an exceptional experience for all our returning and first-year students, a working group consisting of faculty, staff, and students has been diligently designing guidance and support for you to prepare your courses for the fall term. I want to share that guidance and support information with you today.

As the President noted, conventional wisdom of the nation's public health authorities and our own public health faculty is that a second wave of the virus could likely occur sometime during the traditional flu season, starting mid-October or November, at which point we may have to transition again to remote instruction.

Planning for the unknown

Faculty who are teaching in the fall should prepare for different possibilities for instruction. These include: the need to teach your courses virtually; the need to shift quickly from in-person to virtual instruction; and the need to adjust your in-person instruction to accommodate physical distancing requirements in the classroom.

Additionally, you also may have students enrolled in your courses who will not be able to be on campus (due to health or other reasons). The University has committed to ensuring students' timely progression in their education, which means many of you may need to be prepared to offer virtual instruction for those students.

The rapid transition to remote learning due to the emergent health crisis was successful during the spring semester. The exceptional efforts of faculty and staff are very much appreciated. Fortunately, we have time for planning and preparation in anticipation of a second COVID-19 wave during the fall term.

Feedback from students obtained through a survey of SLU undergraduate students illustrates that, overall, students were very appreciative of efforts to allow them to continue their education through the spring semester.

However, we did receive some feedback that highlights student challenges we may not have considered. This includes challenges related to their learning environment (difficulty finding a quiet study area, focusing and motivating in a new environment with competing

domestic/family demands) and classes (workload management, additional assignments for remote learning, and difficulty adapting to the different format). It will be important for each of us to consider the feedback from students as we plan for a possible transition to virtual learning this fall.

Students and parents are also aware that a second wave of COVID-19 is possible and a transition may be necessary. From their perspective, the University has plenty of time to develop plans to respond to the second wave, including incorporation of distance education best practices when transitioning to virtual education delivery.

Assistance is available

I understand that many faculty have competing responsibilities during the summer, from University-related obligations, to familial and community responsibilities. However, it is exceptionally important that as you plan your fall courses, you consider ways to make intentional pedagogical choices that will enhance the learning opportunities beyond those you were able to make in the quick transition this spring.

The guidance and support resources, developed by the working group, are designed to assist in your planning for the fall term. I encourage you to refer to this [web page \(or the first attached document\)](#) for detailed information. The web page provides many resources to support faculty, including Reinert Center resources, peer faculty experienced in virtual teaching, and a framework for using Blackboard to host course materials and information.

Additionally, the working group designed [a survey to further understand your technology needs](#). Please take a few minutes to complete this before the end of the week. This survey will capture the technologies you use during a normal (non-COVID-impacted) semester, as well as instructional activities that may be interrupted should we shift to virtual instruction during the fall term. We will use this information to identify types of technologies that may be worth additional investment as we continue to deliver courses virtually.

Also, please [work with your department chair](#) as you prepare your course(s) for both face-to-face and virtual instruction in the fall. Along with the Reinert Center, your Deans, and other academic support services from the University, we are all here to support you and ensure your success for the fall term.

As the President noted, planning for so many uncertainties is not easy. We appreciate your efforts in taking steps to deliver the best outcomes for our students as we navigate this unprecedented time.

God bless,

Chet Gillis, Ph.D.
Interim Provost