

## Fall 2021 Updates - Course Modalities; Exceptions To Be Fully Online

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Dear Saint Louis University community,

As promised, I am writing with an update on key aspects of fall planning. I appreciate your patience as we continue to process new public health guidance, work with City health officials to understand what restrictions may apply to in-person next fall, and engage University stakeholders to operationalize our intention to get back to as close to normal as possible for academics.

This email provides updates about:

- Classroom distancing in the fall
- Exceptions for instructors and students to teach/learn fully online next fall
- Course modality/schedule/registration possible changes
- Canvas expectations for the fall

I know this email is lengthy, but I want to provide as much information as possible for the updates we can provide at this time.

As has been the case since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the situation is dynamic and we continue to work out the logistical details with care. We have had success throughout the pandemic by balancing our desire to make decisions in a timely manner with our commitment to meaningfully engage with stakeholders to arrive at inclusive decisions. We won't always have complete and final information to share as quickly as any of us would like, but we will continue to share what we can, when we can.

Thanks for your continued patience. I am hopeful that we can announce additional key decisions (such as whether or not we can move to normal distancing in classrooms and how we will approach plans for staff to return to working on campus) in the next couple of weeks.

Sincerely,

Mike Lewis, Ph.D.  
Provost

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### **Classroom Distancing in the Fall (still pending)**

[SLU's recent announcement](#) about the easing of distancing and mask requirements for vaccinated members of our campus is extremely promising as we look ahead to fall classes.

Assuming we have maximum vaccine participation among members of our campus community, we are optimistic that we'll be able to return to a very normal in-person learning experience for students who typically take courses on campus. If we are able to return to normal distancing in classrooms, many courses currently listed as taking place online will be able to convert back to in-person classes.

Of course, much will depend on how the University decides to approach a possible vaccine requirement, and we expect to learn more about that in the coming weeks. I know to many it feels like we should just announce normal distancing in classrooms, but the reality is, we must continue to follow the guidance of the City of St. Louis, as well as other public health officials. We hope to be able to announce soon that courses typically offered in person will again be offered in person in the fall.

### **Requesting an Exception to Teach or Learn Fully Online Next Fall**

If we are able to be back to normal in the classroom, we expect most courses to be offered in person. This means faculty and students will be expected to teach and learn in person. However, we understand that there will continue to be members of our campus community for whom this is not possible. Instructors and students who have a need to remain fully online for the entire fall semester due to COVID-19-specific considerations must request an exception to teach/learn fully online.

A working group comprised of students, faculty, and staff have identified three categories of exceptions:

1. You have a medical condition that prevents you from being on campus safely next fall.
2. You are an international student who will be unable to come to the U.S. for in-person classes due to travel restrictions and/or visa challenges.
3. You have some other COVID-19-specific circumstance that prevents your being on campus at all during the fall semester (e.g., childcare responsibilities due to COVID-19 school restrictions, other caregiving responsibilities for a member of your household due to COVID-19, and other COVID-19-related situations).

If you are in one of these three categories, **you must apply for an exception for the fall semester**, ideally by the dates indicated below. If you are someone who typically teaches/learns in person, you will need to apply for an exception, even if your courses are currently listed as "online." Here's what you need to know:

- This process applies only to faculty/instructors and students who need to teach/learn fully online for the fall semester. This includes international students who expect travel or visa restrictions to prevent their coming to the U.S. in time for the start of fall classes.
- If you are able to be on campus for any activities, you are expected to attend classes in person. This is true for faculty and students.

- This process is just for *courses* (not for other on-campus work expectations for faculty and staff). [As announced earlier](#), courses offered fully online in the fall are expected to be asynchronous.
- This process is specifically for COVID-19-related situations. Any other situations that prevent a person from being on campus for courses should be addressed through normal processes (i.e., Leave of Absence processes, FMLA, etc.).
- If you are approved for an exception to be online and start the fall term online, you must complete the fall term online. This applies to faculty and students alike.
  - International students whose travel/visa restrictions change during the fall semester should plan to complete the fall term online and wait to travel to campus for spring 2022 classes.
- Students who need to be online for a *short-term/temporary* reason (i.e., due to contracting COVID-19, bereavement leave, or other short-term situations) do not need to request an exception. Those absences will be handled as they normally would be, through your instructors, your dean's office, the Dean of Students, etc. Students enrolled in in-person classes are expected to attend class in person, as they normally would.

You may request an exception to be fully online for the fall semester by completing [the Exceptions Request Form here](#). To allow us appropriate time to review and respond to these requests, we are asking you to indicate your need for an exception by the target dates listed below. If you think you may need an exception - even if you are not sure yet - please go ahead and complete the Exceptions Request Form, so we may begin tentative planning in order to be ready for the start of fall classes.

- Medical exceptions (self): July 9
- International exceptions: July 25
- Other exceptions: July 9

Once your form is submitted, it will be routed to the appropriate review group. Requests will be considered on a rolling basis and decisions communicated in a timely manner. Decisions about exceptions requests (for faculty and students) may be impacted by accreditation restrictions.

- Medical exceptions will be reviewed by HR/Employee Health (for faculty) and Disability Services/Student Health (for students). It is important to know that the initial request form does not require you to share personal medical information. Additional documentation necessary to process individual exception requests will be requested by the review group. Appropriate security and privacy procedures will be followed.
- International exceptions will be reviewed by the Office of International Services.
- Requests for exceptions based on other COVID-19-related circumstances will be reviewed by a small team representing relevant offices. For faculty, this will include a member of the Provost's office, a designee of your school/college, and Human Resources. For students, this will include a member of the Provost's office, a designee of your school/college, a Student Development representative (such as the Dean of

Students), and a student (graduate or undergraduate, depending on your status). Student reviewers will receive a redacted version of the request, to assure student privacy. Other offices may have representation, depending on the particular needs of an individual's situation.

### **Course Modality/Schedule/Registration Changes**

Of course, if we are able to return most classes to in-person instruction, it will mean some changes for fall course offerings, including modality changes and student schedule adjustments. Although we still don't have final answers about which courses will change, we can tell you what we know right now.

- **Courses currently scheduled as *in-person***: will continue to be offered in person, on the published days/times. (Locations are subject to change.)
- **Courses currently scheduled as *synchronous online***: will likely convert to in-person classes on the published days/times (unless the instructor is approved for an exception to teach fully online). For instructors approved for an exception to teach fully online, these courses will likely convert to *asynchronous online*, in alignment with the [previously announced](#) expectation that fully online courses should be taught asynchronously and in alignment with the [University's Online Course Design rubric](#) (though these courses are not required to undergo peer review for fall).
- **Courses currently scheduled as *asynchronous online***: will likely convert to in-person classes — unless an instructor has been approved for an exception to teach fully online. The days/times for these courses will be based on instructor schedule and classroom availability. We expect to have updated course listings later this summer.
  - *Note for instructors currently assigned to asynchronous online courses: Please begin working with your department representative to make sure they know what your preferences will be for days/times if your online courses are able to be converted to in-person courses. No schedule changes can be made at this time, since we still do not have approval to reduce or eliminate distancing in classrooms. However, in the event we receive approval, we want to be ready to change course listings as quickly as possible.*
- **Courses currently listed as *A/B, in-person***: will likely convert back to regular courses, where students attend both A and B class meetings. The published days/times will remain in place. (Locations are subject to change.)

We recognize that some of these changes will come with the need to revise fall course schedules for students. And we know this is disruptive and stressful, for students and for the academic advisors who support them. We are doing our best to resolve the open questions as quickly as possible.

### **Canvas Expectations for the Fall**

This past academic year, all courses were required to use the University learning management system (LMS), which was Blackboard for most courses. This requirement was intended to make a potential pivot to fully remote instruction easier if we needed to make a shift.

Given that the University is transitioning to Canvas this summer, we will not *require* that all course instructors use Canvas next fall. However, a working group of faculty, students, and staff have developed recommendations related to Canvas use, and I have accepted those recommendations. They are as follows:

- In keeping with effective pedagogical practice, all faculty are strongly encouraged to include basic course information in Canvas for all courses. Minimally, we recommend all faculty include their contact information and complete syllabus (consistent with [the University's Course Syllabus Policy](#)) in the Canvas course.
- If a course uses a learning management system (LMS), that LMS *must* be Canvas. This requirement will apply to all courses, should the University need to pivot to fully remote instruction. *Note: this expectation does not apply to courses in the School of Law.*
- If other applications are used as a primary component of a course, such as a textbook-based application, faculty are strongly encouraged to link to those applications from inside their Canvas course.
- Courses that have a [distance education](#) component for one or more students (e.g., totally or partially online, regular Zoom meetings, etc.) *must* use Canvas.
- Academic units have the authority to require Canvas use in all of their courses.