

From: [Office of the MSU Provost](#)
Subject: Update on Planning and Preliminary Academic Considerations for Fall 2020
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Dear Faculty Colleagues,

I am writing today to provide you an overview of the scenario planning and preparations for the upcoming Fall semester that are underway at Montana State University and will continue throughout the summer.

When COVID-19 and concerns for public health emerged in the Spring, MSU faculty, staff, and students demonstrated a commitment to community and worked together to move rapidly to remote delivery of instruction. The pandemic and the uncertainty about the capacity to care for those who became ill prompted a shift, throughout the world of higher education, to the use of new technologies to communicate and to deliver course content. We are profoundly grateful to our faculty for the success of this transition.

Indicators from the scientific community, the CDC and our local health and epidemiology experts tell us that the COVID-19 virus will remain a fact of life this Fall. At Montana State University, we will continue to work together to aggressively and creatively tackle and manage complexities that the COVID-19 virus represents. As we look forward to the Fall semester, our goal is to protect the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff while providing a high-quality, on-campus educational experience. To achieve this, all of us will need to exercise caution and alter some of our habits to keep each other safe while allowing for maximum flexibility to respond to changing circumstances.

A University Reconstitution Planning Committee is developing strategies for implementing necessary changes across key operational areas including research, academics, university services, auxiliaries, finance, IT and others. Terry Leist, VP of Administration and Finance, and I are co-chairing the committee with support from a variety of other sources including our scientists and local health experts. The MSU Academic Continuity Task Force, chaired by Vice Provost Tami Eitle is a key part of this advisory effort and includes representatives from Faculty Affairs,

Center for Faculty Excellence, Academic Technology and Outreach, with input from our Deans. Faculty Senate leadership is involved and will contribute to the planning process throughout the summer.

The Reconstitution Planning Committee and the Academic Continuity Task Force are examining alternatives for a variety of possible scenarios in the Fall. I will provide updates as the summer progresses, but for now, as we come to the close of Spring Semester, I share with you some of the key academic adaptations that will likely constitute essential components of our Fall operations. These adaptations might include:

- Seeking larger than typical rooms for courses with sufficient space per person to continue safe face-to-face delivery, with a priority for achieving safe face-to-face delivery in the smaller first-year classes.
- Providing some fully on-line sections in multi-section classes to offer options to students and faculty, and to help extend classroom availability.
- Blending in-room and on-line delivery, perhaps including rotating face time among sub-groups of the enrolled students, to allow for physical distancing while maintaining section caps.
- Blending face-to-face and online learning so that students have an element of face-to-face instruction to build community, but also can work together in pairs or small groups through on-line or virtual tools.
- Using instructional laboratory time for work that is difficult to adapt to a virtual modality, while shifting exercises that are more conducive to remote practice to on-line delivery.
- Practicing physical distancing in studios and maker spaces to allow for the necessary student educational experience while keeping everyone safe.
- Reducing the number of electives and optional courses offered to fulfill CORE to help extend classroom availability.
- Creating new building and classroom entrance and exit procedures and adjustments to the flow of pedestrian traffic on campus.
- Adjusting to a stretched daily schedule of classes to allow more time between classes.

Collectively, these ideas suggest that preparation for the Fall must start early. It is clear that our Fall Semester will include more on-line content than in the past. We are grateful for the speed and cooperation with which MSU faculty adapted their Spring courses. To be ready for any potential transitions in the Fall, we recommend that faculty develop and structure their Fall courses in ways that allow for fluid adaptations to

potentially changing circumstances.

The use of delivery methods that blend face-to-face and remote delivery with frequent assessment of student progress, for example, will ensure a high degree of readiness to accommodate a transition to fully on-line delivery, if necessitated by an increase in virus cases or required by public health authorities. Moreover, as part of our responsible preparation efforts, every individual course should be ready for contingent, temporary on-line delivery, with back-up plans for instructors and for assessment. Likewise, programs with hands-on labs and studios should be considering novel ways to use specially outfitted spaces to continue to deliver high-quality experiential instruction with safe distancing.

I will provide academic-related updates throughout the Summer as we continue to refine our scenario plans. If you have questions or suggestions, please contact me (provost@montana.edu), or relay your input to your department head or dean. Later this week, you will receive information about a faculty survey that will be administered by the MSU Office of Planning and Analysis so that we can learn from you as we continue to adapt our response to COVID-19. I value your input – we are all on the same team as we seek innovative and creative approaches to maintaining a high level of research and academic excellence.

Like you, I look forward to stepping out of this temporary virtual world and back into an environment where we can once again live, learn and enjoy the personal interactions that we miss on our incredible campus and beautiful surrounding community. This Fall will not be the same as we remember in the past, there will be changes that require our flexibility and patience. However, we will stay true to our mission and we will do this together while maintaining safety and minimizing risk for our students, faculty and staff. Now more than ever we have to take care of the next, rising generation – our mission as a Land Grant University has never been more important.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob".

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