

Dear Colleagues,

I write to communicate additional decisions reached by the Academic Restart Committee (ARC) regarding the Fall semester which have been reviewed and approved by Provost DesRoches and President Leebron. I hope that this communication will clarify most of the questions that many of you have. In order to provide additional information and clarification on academic delivery for this coming Fall, Provost DesRoches, Kevin Kirby, and I will hold a town hall from 3 – 4 pm next Tuesday, June 23 from 3 – 4 pm. Details to connect via Zoom will be sent later this week.

The first set of decisions relate to the Academic Calendar:

- Instruction will begin as originally planned on Monday, August 24, 2020
- Instruction will end on Friday, Nov. 20, 2020
- Labor Day will remain as a holiday with no classes scheduled
- The 2 day midterm recess in October is cancelled
- The week of Nov. 30 – Dec. 4, 2020 will be an “independent study” week – work such as papers, homework assignments, and similar materials that are currently allowed by the General Announcements (GA) to be due the last week of classes may be made due on Thursday or Friday of that week (Dec. 3-4) but there will be no class meetings during the week
- December 4, 2020 will remain the official “last day of classes” for the Fall 2020 semester
- Study days (Dec. 5 – 8) and final exam days (Dec. 9 – 16) will remain as originally scheduled
- Final exams will be conducted in a remote format
- Election day (November 3, 2020) will be a regular class day; however, no assignments can be due that day and all instructional material covered on that day must be available asynchronously

Ending instruction on the Friday before Thanksgiving will allow students who can to travel home for the holiday and not have to return to campus for in-person meetings after Thanksgiving. Maintaining December 4 as the official end of classes and maintaining the schedule of the study days and final exam period prevents potential negative impacts to student financial aid. Additionally, this schedule will provide ample time to wrap up end-of-semester work. The special handling of election day is required because of uncertainties around the ability of members of our community to be able to vote in a safe and timely manner caused by COVID-19.

As a result of the calendar adjustments for the end of the semester, additional considerations apply to assignments and exams at this time which balance pedagogical needs with the desire to not have an excessive amount of time pass between the end of instruction and when final exams are taken:

- The last week for in person class presentations will be the week before Thanksgiving. Any presentations required after November 20 must be handled remotely
- As was the case this past Spring, instructors are strongly encouraged to give take home, open book, open note final exams that will be governed by the standard GA policy; furthermore, instructors are encouraged to make their take home exams available by Monday, November 30, but such exams will not be required to be available until the normal time (December 4 or December 7 at the latest)

- As per the Rice Honor Code: Proctoring software for exams and finals will not be allowed except in programs where they are already used (e.g. Online Master of Computer Science)

Finally, the calendar adjustments described above combined with the need to meet contact time requirements for accreditation as well as the classroom space issues caused by social distancing, a number of other measures will be put in place that affect the normal daily schedule. These are:

- Class durations for most courses will be increased by 5 minutes per class in order to meet contact time requirements for Fall
- Courses with enrollments of 100 or more will be offered only online
- Courses with enrollments of 50 - 99 will default to being offered online only; however, a number of instructors have expressed a desire to accommodate these larger classes and still preserve a significant in person experience. For these courses, the instructor should make a request to their chair to offer the course in dual format utilizing a plan that caps individual in-person class meetings at 50 persons. If the chair agrees with the plan, the request should be forwarded to the Provost. Such requests should be made as soon as possible, but must be made by June 30, 2020
- ARC will shortly provide a set of guidelines and suggestions on how to handle dual delivery for courses with enrollments between 50 – 99 which will include the possibility to teach two sections of the course if desired; however, individual faculty will decide exactly how to deal with their specific course. Some of the suggestions may be useful for those teaching courses with smaller enrollments; however, teaching multiple sections of courses with fewer than 50 students which requires additional classroom resources will not be permitted
- Other than large classes that are moved only online, all courses normally assigned a room will be assigned a room so students can gather even if the instructor is present remotely in order to better facilitate student interactions
- The daily class schedule will be reconfigured and classes assigned times and rooms in order to provide a sufficiently large space to operate under the guidelines described above. The daily schedule will include 20 minutes in between meeting times in order to accommodate potentially longer walking distances between classes, allow for less congestion in halls, and entrances/exits
- Instructors must be prepared to deliver any class in a dual format on any given day; however, in person class meetings in which every person is actually present are not required to be held in dual delivery format

I wish to thank you all for your continued efforts to bring our students back to campus this Fall.

Sincerely,

Christopher Johns-Krull, ARC Chair