

ARC Message on Maximum Class Size Change and Guidelines for Exemptions to In-Person Course Delivery for Fall 2020 – June 29, 2020

The goal of this document is to provide (1) updates on maximum class size information, (2) information about a new deadline for course information, (3) guidance regarding the implications of these changes, and (4) guidance for exemptions to in-person course delivery expectations.

Rice University just announced that maximum class sizes for Fall 2020 will be reduced to 25 students. This impacts plans that have been made including information that many departments have sent to the Registrar. Some of those decisions and plans may now change, requiring new information to be sent to the Registrar. As a result, **the deadline to submit the requested information to the Registrar is being pushed back to no later than July 8**. The Office of the Registrar is updating their information web page on this, at: <https://registrar.rice.edu/preparing-for-fall-2020>.

As a result of the new class size decision, courses with enrollments above 25 will default to online only. As was described in the ARC communication for Guidance on Large Classes, instructors may wish to adopt other strategies for courses with an enrollment greater than 25 that still preserves a substantial in-person experience. Instructors are encouraged to still propose this; however, individual class meetings will still be capped at 25. If this is desired, instructors should discuss potential plans with their chair; however, courses above 100 will remain online only. If the chair supports the plans, those plans should be communicated to the dean who will forward the plan to the Provost, who will then advise the Registrar, if approved. If the required classroom resources can be secured, such plans will be implemented.

Even, with the reduction in maximum class size, the current plan remains for dual delivery of many courses this Fall, and is motivated by the goal of providing, as much as possible, the intimate residential learning experience that Rice is well known for, while at the same time providing educational opportunity to students who are not able to be on campus. The dual delivery plan will also allow Rice University to switch to fully remote learning if required by the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to provide as safe an environment as possible on the campus for the in-person part of dual delivery, the university is adopting a number of safety measures for this Fall which can be found in the announcements collected on the main COVID response webpage here:

https://coronavirus.rice.edu/?utm_source=alert&utm_medium=alert%20banner&utm_campaign=Coronavirus

Dual delivery requires that course material be available to students who may gather in a classroom as well as those engaging purely remotely; however, dual delivery does not always require the instructor to be present in the classroom to deliver that component of the course, though this is a significant component of the Rice educational experience. While the in-person learning environment is highly desired by both students and instructors, some members of our community are at high risk of severe illness due to coronavirus infection or have members of their household who are at high risk. The CDC has identified several categories of people who are at higher risk, and these can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

Instructors, or anyone else required to deliver course material in the classroom, whether they are faculty, staff, graduate students, or some other formal classification, are not expected to teach in-person if they or members of their households are at higher risk for complications due to COVID-19. For these instructors, however, there also may be a way to preserve an in-person component to the course that offers additional safety for the instructor. These include:

- The instructor offers in-person recitation sessions
- The instructor has in-person office hours by appointment
- The class can be divided in smaller groups so that only a fraction (for example, a half or a third, depending on the number of weekly sessions) of the students attend class in-person every session (i.e. reduce student density) for in-person instruction
- The instructor has in-person small group meetings to work/mentor on a class project

According to Rice Policy 846 and our accrediting agency (SACSCOC), a course in which 50% or more of the instruction is delivered with the students and the instructor not in the same room is classified as a *Distance or Online Course* and must be so-designated in our records (e.g. in the Course Catalog). This information must be collected separately for each course. This information will be particularly important for some groups of students (e.g. international students) who are limited in the number of hours they can take online and will likely also be important to our students as they adjust their academic schedules.

Courses that are classified as a *Distance or Online Course* are designated as “online” courses in the Course Schedule, <https://courses.rice.edu/>, and require the full suite of online course trainings described in Provost DesRoches’ communication to campus on June 18 and which is available at:

<https://registrar.rice.edu/sites/g/files/bxs751/f/Required%20Training%20for%20Fully%20Online%20Courses%20for%20the%20Fall%20%286-18-2020%29.pdf>

Each school’s dean, working with department chairs needs to collect information on which courses will be offered as an in-person class. As you respond to these questions from your dean or chair, you do not need to provide any confidential information (medical or otherwise). As stated above, the threshold for in person delivery in this case is 50% of the course instruction. As you decide how to answer this for your course, please only think about how you intend to deliver the course. Assume that all students will be able to attend the course according to however you choose to set it up. Under that assumption, if you intend to deliver 50% or more of the course instruction from a different place than the classroom, you should indicate you are not teaching in-person for that course. While this will capture the essential information needed now by the Registrar, we encourage instructors to provide in their syllabi a fuller description of how the course delivery will be constructed for your course so that students will have a better idea of what instruction will look like for each of the courses in which they enroll.