

The following message is being sent to all Academic Senate Members

UC SANTA BARBARA Academic Senate

April 16, 2021

Divisional Chair's Newsletter - April 2021

Welcome to this special edition of the Divisional Chair's Newsletter, which is intended to update Academic Senate members on the University's fall reopening plans.

Dear Colleagues,

I write to you today with information relevant to faculty regarding our University's [fall reopening plans](#), and the role of the Academic Senate in these discussions. You are also encouraged to consult the information posted on our website regarding the Senate's [faculty survey](#) in March, and our April 8 [Town Hall meeting](#) on fall instructional planning.



Our campus has been officially closed to most indoor instruction since spring 2020. Thanks to the strenuous efforts of many instructors, we have been able to keep operating via remote instruction for the past year. This mode of operation required emergency exceptions to Senate policy, and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) policy, which designate the default mode of instruction as in person. Without these emergency exceptions, faculty and students are expected to be in residence during instructional quarters (fall-winter-spring), unless they have an approved leave.

The rapid expansion in vaccine availability in California is one of the reasons for President Drake's [announcement](#) last month that all UC campuses should be able to reopen in the fall. [Santa Barbara County](#) is reporting that over 270,000 vaccine doses have been delivered to about 460,000 county residents, and that [nearly half of the population](#) aged 16 and older has now been vaccinated. The latest County [health order](#) allows in person instruction at 25% capacity. In addition, Governor Newsom [announced](#) last week that all institutions of higher education in California should be able to offer in-person instruction in compliance with Cal/OSHA emergency temporary standards and public health guidelines, starting June 15.

Since planning for fall quarter 2021 is already underway, we need to make decisions for fall based not on current public health conditions, but on the conditions we expect to be in effect in September. *Public health guidance in the fall is expected to be less restrictive than it is right now.* These projections are based on our assessments of the progress of the pandemic, and of the vaccination rollout. Although our extrapolations are necessarily subject to modification as new information comes to light, we anticipate that it will be appropriate to re-open our university for most types of classroom instruction, and to resume many aspects of regular campus operations. As you know, some campus research activities have gradually been allowed to resume, and more activities are expected to be approved in the coming months. The research ramp-up is not coupled to the University's instructional timetable.

In fall, we expect to revert to the default in-person instructional mode that many students and instructors strongly prefer, and are eager to resume. I understand that some instructors may wish to continue to offer courses online, having adopted new technologies and developed new content during the emergency remote instruction period that is well-suited to their courses. Regular online instruction occurs with prior Senate approval. This approval is required for any course in which 50% or more of the instruction (from the student perspective) is offered online. Courses that already have such approvals are designated with a "W" in the schedule of classes (e.g., HIST W 80). Requests for online course approvals undergo a rigorous review that includes the submission of [materials](#) by the instructor to the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) of the relevant College, and further review by the Committee on Courses and General Education (CCGE). Based on what we have learned about remote instruction in the past year, the Undergraduate Council and CCGE are beginning to revisit existing Senate policies and processes to include new opportunities in online instruction, while maintaining our university's high quality standards for instruction.

Temporary approval for continued remote instruction in the fall will be granted as-needed and automatically, *without the need for formal Senate review*, in any of the following three scenarios:

1. It is possible (although not considered likely at this time) that there will be state or county restrictions on either the maximum size of an in-person class (e.g., 200 persons), or the classroom capacity (e.g., 50% of normal capacity). If this happens, we will not be able to schedule all classes in our available classroom spaces, and some of our largest classes may have to be offered either fully or partly remotely.
2. It is possible (and considered likely at this time) that some of our international students will be unable to arrive in time for the start of fall quarter, due to the backlog of visa processing. If this happens, departments will need to be able to offer appropriate remote instruction to these students. For example, the Office of Undergraduate Education will work with departments which offer large courses in multiple iterations to plan for one or more of the iterations to be either fully or partly remote to accommodate these students.
3. Some instructors (both faculty and graduate students) may have medical conditions that prevent them from teaching in person in fall quarter as well. "Reasonable accommodations," as negotiated by the Workplace Accommodations team, might include remote teaching. Faculty are encouraged to consult with [Human Resources](#) about the accommodation process. Instructors with other personal circumstances that complicate their return to campus in the fall can also contact [Human Resources](#) and should discuss their needs with their department chair or dean.

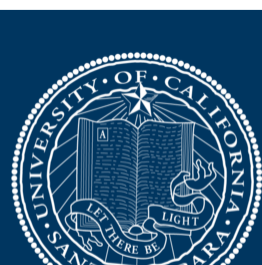
The possibility of partly remote instruction in some courses (i.e., offering both in-person and remote components) raises some important questions about faculty workload. *The EVC has [announced](#) that instructors will not be required to teach in dual modes if it would lead to a significant increase in their workload.* Instructors who are willing to teach both face-to-face and remote students may need specially equipped classrooms and additional support from deans, via their chairs. [Instructional Development](#) is available to consult and assist in developing plans for such courses. Instructors may also find the summer 2021 Reimagining Instruction for the Student Experience (RISE) Institute helpful in refining their teaching plans (details coming soon on the [Keep Teaching](#) website).

I recognize that these plans will not allay the concerns of all faculty. Many campus leaders on the University's COVID-19 taskforce, including myself, are working diligently to anticipate and address your concerns prior to fall quarter. We will need to provide you updates on the following issues as they progress:

1. A systemwide committee is looking into the issue of a vaccine mandate. Details of the process for verifying vaccination status, and requiring COVID-19 testing, are also under development.
2. We expect public health guidance to require continued mask-wearing on campus, impacting the comfort and effectiveness of in-person teaching for some instructors (depending in part on class size, format, and subject). Several options are under study, including the use of microphones.
3. Ventilation systems in campus buildings where instructors work and teach have been assessed and, where necessary, improved by Design, Facilities, and Safety Services. The reports can be viewed by interested faculty in the [Guidance for Use of Faculty Offices](#) document, and concerns can be directed to the appropriate building committees.
4. We expect most K-12 schools and childcare centers to be operating in the fall, staffed by widely vaccinated teachers. Vaccine authorizations for older children may be in place by fall, based on clinical trials underway now. We also know that local childcare availability and affordability continue to be a challenge and require more discussion and planning.

Many faculty are eager to leave some of the challenges of the pandemic behind us and resume more normal interactions with our students on campus. In the spirit and the practice of shared governance, I invite you to communicate your ideas and concerns to the Senate, and I welcome the opportunity to incorporate your input into our campus reopening planning.

Sincerely,
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