In the Presence of COVID-19: Teaching and Learning Framework for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

JULY 7, 2020
In the Presence of COVID-19: Teaching and Learning Framework for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

The Context

The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly and dramatically changed the process of teaching and learning at the University of Regina, its Federated Colleges, and other partner institutions on March 16, 2020. That day, all coursework, regardless of location, was suspended for four days to convert in-person face-to-face courses to remote delivery – either synchronously via Zoom or asynchronously online via existing UR Courses. This rapid transition to all-remote teaching and learning was implemented to protect the health and safety of the University and larger community. It was based on the directives from Saskatchewan’s Chief Medical Health Officer, and made in consultation with the Ministry of Advanced Education and other Saskatchewan postsecondary institutions.

Once coursework resumed on 20 March, the Winter 2020 term was completed at a distance - including all teaching, assignments, quizzes, labs, group work and examinations at the Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert campuses, the Federated Colleges, and at partner institutions such as the Regional Colleges. In keeping with provincial health recommendations on public gatherings, the Spring/Summer 2020 term is now in the process of being completed in the same way.

Over the 2020-2021 academic year, the teaching and learning experience at the University, Federated Colleges, and partner institutions that deliver University of Regina programming will take place primarily at a distance. For that reason, we are working very hard to make the remote teaching and learning experience as positive and academically rewarding as possible for both students and teaching staff. At the same time, we recognize the value of – and over the coming academic year want to create opportunities for – in-person interactions and learning experiences that have always been an important part of a university education. With that in mind, a limited number of low-density in-person coursework components (including labs, studios and fieldwork) will be held, but with strict adherence to increased requirements for physical distancing and other COVID-19 health and safety measures as mandated/recommended by the Chief Medical Health Officer.

In this context, therefore, it is important to implement a cautious and well-thought-out framework for teaching and learning for the 2020-2021 academic year at the University of Regina, Federated Colleges, and partner institutions that deliver University of Regina programming. This framework proposes a gradual re-introduction of some on-campus teaching and learning while supporting the health and safety needs of students, faculty and staff, recognizing what for now is a new educational reality. The University and its Federated Colleges are committed to providing the best possible service to our students, i.e. a seamless experience between the four institutions and other educational
partners. Coordination between the institutions has been very strong before and through the pandemic and will remain so as the 2020-2021 framework for teaching and learning is implemented.

This framework, developed by the University’s Academic Incremental Recovery Working Group (AIR – whose membership is listed at the end of this document) will be congruent with the University’s COVID-19 operational and research frameworks that are also parts of the University and Federated Colleges’ overall efforts to minimize the pandemic’s disruption to our teaching, research, service, and work environment.

Guiding Principles

The University's framework for teaching and learning for 2020-2021 is guided, in part, through principles for the re-opening of Saskatchewan’s postsecondary sector. These principles were developed by the Ministry of Advanced Education in consultation with the province’s post-secondary institutions.

The Ministry of Advanced Education’s guiding principles state that:

1. Student, faculty, and staff health and safety is paramount;
2. All public health guidelines and protocols will be followed;
3. Institutions will continue providing quality educational experiences for learners and make best efforts to ensure the ongoing participation of vulnerable learners;
4. Institutions will strive to ensure academic and student health and wellness support services are available to all students;
5. Priority should be given to programs that support critical areas of the labour market, such as the health sector;
6. In-person, applied, hands-on programs and research should be given priority when considering a return to campus;
7. Saskatchewan institutions will make efforts to cooperate and collaborate to enhance program delivery and support students; and
8. Institutions will communicate timely, consistent information to students, staff and the public.
In addition, the University’s Academic Incremental Recovery Working Group has established, and in developing this framework is committed to, the following related principles:

1. Providing the highest-quality education possible while meeting the learning needs of students and the teaching needs of instructors;
2. Maintaining operational flexibility in light of the fluid COVID-19 situation, including possible next waves of the pandemic and/or influenza season that could take place;
3. Recognizing that the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on our operations will continue to be a source of anxiety for many;
4. Developing plans that are consistent with the sector-wide approach in the province, but that take into account any considerations or circumstances unique to the University of Regina, the Federated Colleges, and other education partners; and
5. Ensuring that any return to in-person teaching and learning is undertaken in close concert with the University’s operational and research COVID-19 planning.

A Living Document

It is important to note that this framework for teaching and learning in the 2020-2021 academic year is a living document. As it is implemented in light of the rapidly developing COVID-19 situation, it will be subject to continuous evaluation and evolution. As circumstances dictate, changes to the framework will be shared with the University community (for example, e-mail, the University webpage, town hall meetings) with any changes clearly communicated to ensure that all members of the University community are aware of and can plan for the re-introduction of in-person campus academic activity. University Advancement & Communications will pay particular attention to widely, clearly, and quickly communicating any changes.

Factors that could alter this framework and its implementation include but are not limited to:

- Changing public health directives from the Chief Medical Health Officer and the Public Health Agency of Canada depending on the state of the pandemic;
- The possible surge or resurgence of COVID-19 during the late fall/early winter;
- Consultations with the Ministry of Health regarding the density of on-campus populations;
- Consultations with the University community during each term to consider suggestions and concerns;
- The development and availability of an effective COVID-19 vaccine; and
• Safety lessons learned as the University works through each term of returning, where feasible, to in-person teaching and learning.

What follows is a 2020-2021 framework for teaching and learning at the University of Regina, the Federated Colleges, and other affiliated institutions that deliver University of Regina programming.¹

**Spring/Summer Term 2020 - Teaching and learning entirely at a distance**

**Context**

• This term is a continuation of teaching and learning modalities that were urgently implemented in Winter 2020 when the pandemic forced a sudden shift to remote teaching and learning. Unlike in the Winter 2020 term, time was available to enhance pedagogy and student learning experiences, as well as to support faculty to prepare courses offered during the Spring/Summer 2020 term.

• When the Spring/Summer 2020 term began in early May, the Government of Saskatchewan’s public health guidelines mandated that all courses be delivered at a distance.

• The Spring/Summer 2020 term commenced and will finish this way at all campuses.

**Supports for Students and Teaching Staff**

• Resources to support instructors and students teaching and learning at a distance are currently available at [https://www.uregina.ca/spring-summer/](https://www.uregina.ca/spring-summer/).

---

¹ In response to the evolving circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic (i) the University may be required to add, delete or change course or program requirements, (ii) academic activities (including courses, seminars, graduate supervision, labs, experiential learning, practica, fieldwork, placements, etc.), may be affected or altered, and (iii) co-curricular opportunities, programs and services, and the manner of delivery of courses, are all subject to change. As well, the University may, from time to time, impose additional rules, procedures and protocols as it deems necessary or as it may be required to do by public authorities to mitigate against the risk of the spread and/or transmission of infectious disease, including COVID-19, on the University campus, and students will be expected to comply with all such rules, procedures, and protocols (including any measures related to preventing or mitigating the spread of infectious disease or quarantining if a student is suspected of carrying an infectious disease). While the University is committed to providing appropriate instructional and supervisory support and services to students, students are not guaranteed the same learning approaches or “university” experience, or non-academic activities and services, they would have received in the absence of this health emergency. The University thanks its students, faculty, and staff for their understanding and flexibility during these challenging times as we work together to maintain the standards of excellence that are the hallmark of the University of Regina.
• All academic and student service supports such as advising, tutoring and counselling are being offered remotely (primarily via Zoom), and the University Library is physically closed but with robust online resources available.

**Fall 2020 - Remote teaching and learning with a small number of low-density in-person courses**

**Context**

As announced by Interim President and Vice-Chancellor Chase on May 12, 2020, “a continuation of the remote delivery we are now using offers students in the Fall term the best chance of academic success as we navigate the rapidly changing landscape of the global pandemic.”

**Fall 2020 Remote Teaching and Learning: An Overview**

For the Fall 2020 term, most teaching and learning will be delivered remotely. Remote teaching includes several modalities and these modalities typically occur along a continuum between primarily synchronous (virtual real-time class meetings) and primarily asynchronous (web-based). The University of Regina uses Zoom for synchronous course delivery and UR Courses for asynchronous course delivery. It is anticipated that most Fall 2020 course delivery will take place somewhere on the synchronous-asynchronous continuum.

**Primarily synchronous teaching (Zoom-based)**

**RLDS [Remote Learning Delivery Special] scheduling code**

Zoom enables virtual face-to-face approaches to teaching and learning. These classes are “live”; that is, faculty and students gather together virtually to teach and learn in Zoom classrooms. These courses are offered on specific days/times as scheduled by the Registrar’s Office. The date/time of the class cannot be changed because students are organizing their lives around these teaching times.

There are more than 1,900 Zoom class sections scheduled for Fall 2020; thus, these courses are indeed the mainstay of teaching and learning at the University. As course instructors prepare their Zoom-based courses, they are also encouraged to incorporate some asynchronous components (UR Courses) into their courses, the extent of which is best decided by the instructor. For example, they can post teaching materials and links to relevant online resources on their UR Courses page that can be accessed at any time by the students in the class. The UR Courses platform also provides course instructors with the emailing list of students in the class; the UR Courses emailing tool is a convenient way of communicating with students and accepting student assignments. UR Courses now features
integrated Zoom capability thus, course instructors and students can easily access Zoom in UR Courses.

Course instructors may wish to augment their primarily Zoom-based courses with UR Courses-based asynchronous elements, since engaging in teaching and learning through a 3-hour Zoom class can be challenging. For example, Zoom classes may be taught for 1.5 hours and then faculty can have students engage in asynchronous learning that is essentially equivalent to an additional 1.5 hours of teaching/learning.

**Asynchronous Courses (UR Courses-based) RLWS [Remote Learning Web Special] scheduling code**

In response to the need to teach remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some courses may be delivered in an asynchronous format using the UR Courses platform, subject to the applicable Faculty/unit policy or decision-making processes and approvals. However, such courses may not have benefited from the assistance of the Centre for Continuing Education’s Instructional Design team. The need to ensure a quality learning experience is paramount and it is vital that UR Courses-based asynchronous courses reflect best practices in teaching and learning in an asynchronous context. Course instructors are encouraged to consult the remote teaching and learning resources provided by the CCE/Flexible Learning Division and Information Services, please see [https://www.uregina.ca/spring-summer/remote-teaching.html](https://www.uregina.ca/spring-summer/remote-teaching.html). The equivalent webpage for the Fall semester will be live in early July.

It is important to note that asynchronous courses are typically delivered such that students are able to manage them on their own schedule rather than attend class on a specific date/time. If course instructors wish to include some synchronous events or sessions as part of their UR Courses-based asynchronous courses, they need to be very cautious about the extent of such synchronous components. When a course is scheduled as web-based asynchronous, students will be registering in the course on the understanding that they are not expected to attend virtual real-time class meetings. Limited synchronous elements in an asynchronous course might, for example, include: a class session on clarifying major course concepts or reviewing some more difficult topics; a class meeting to go over course assignment requirements; or check-ins with students.

When a Fall course that was originally scheduled as face-to-face, on-campus delivery is converted to a web-based asynchronous course, subject to the applicable Faculty policy or decision-making processes and approvals, any synchronous (virtual live) elements of such asynchronous course must be offered within the original class time as scheduled by the Registrar’s Office (virtual real-time office hours are exempt from this rule). This is to avoid creating class-schedule conflicts for those students already registered in Fall courses. Furthermore, the virtual live elements of such asynchronous courses need
to be communicated to students well in advance of the start of the Fall semester so that students can select their courses and organize their time and lives accordingly.

Therefore, the date/time of virtual live class meetings or events in an asynchronous course must be entered in the Section Long Text of SSATEXT in Banner by **August 15, 2020 at the latest**. Faculties, Federated Colleges, and academic units are responsible for their own SSATEXT entries. The date/time of virtual live sessions must be also included in the course syllabus and/or the UR Courses page.

Resources supporting the development of remote courses (UR Courses and Zoom) are available at [https://www.uregina.ca/spring-summer/remote-teaching.html](https://www.uregina.ca/spring-summer/remote-teaching.html). The equivalent webpage for the Fall semester will be live in early July.

**WEB-delivered and LIVE-streamed courses**

There are two other types of remote delivery courses. These courses (few in number) predate the University’s decision to teach most courses remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **WEB-delivered courses** are UR Courses-based asynchronous courses like RLWS courses. Distinct from RLWS courses, which were developed by course instructors as special delivery for the Fall 2020 term, courses coded “WEB-delivered” have been developed with the aid of Instructional Design teams and are regularly offered as WEB-delivered courses.
- Similar to RLDS courses, **LIVE-streamed courses** are streamed over the Internet, using Zoom or other similar platforms, and delivered in partnership with the Regional Colleges. Most LIVE-streamed courses were created prior to the University’s transition to remote teaching and learning as a result of COVID-19, and thus, they are regularly scheduled as LIVE-streamed.
- **Courses scheduled for Fall 2020 as fully WEB-delivered or LIVE-streamed and developed through the Centre for Continuing Education or elsewhere will remain as scheduled.**

**Supports for Students and Teaching Staff**

- Recognizing that the teaching and learning experience must be of the highest quality possible both for students and for instructors as it did for Spring/Summer 2020, the University will develop and make available enhanced resources to support both students and instructors. Once these resources are fully developed, a link to them will be communicated to all members of the University e.g., students, faculty, and staff.
- The University Library will permit limited in-person services for Fall 2020 (including curb-side pick-up and drop-off of resource materials). The majority of its services and resources will be accessed at a distance similar to the approach applied in Spring/Summer 2020. The Library’s plans for service may be found at [https://uregina.libguides.com/covid-19](https://uregina.libguides.com/covid-19). Of note, the Library
is considering appointment-based access to the main floor computers and some main floor solo study spaces. Additional information will be provided by the Library closer to September.

- All members of the University community will be able to order hard copies of books through the online Campus Store for curb-side pick-up, or for either domestic or international delivery. Electronic versions of textbooks will also be available for purchase.
- Facilities Management is also exploring the possibility of having additional solo study spaces throughout the University.
- Other student academic supports – tutoring, workshops, academic advising, and personal counselling, for example – will continue to be offered at a distance, primarily via Zoom.

Health and Safety Protocols

It is important to note that all on-campus teaching and learning activities in the coming academic year must adhere to COVID-19-related health and safety protocols initiated under the guidance of the University’s Health, Safety & Wellness and Facilities Management personnel.

These protocols will be strictly applied to any in-person teaching and learning that takes place in 2020-2021. Academic units will be provided with the necessary tools, consultations, and supports to develop a health and safety plan for each in-person course component. Common to these safety plans are the following:

- Mandating that all instructors and students view the COVID-19 health and safety orientation session (module; power point) prior to attending their first in-person course component. Instructors are encouraged to post the orientation session in UR Courses;
- Requiring students and instructors to carefully self-monitor their health throughout the term;
- Determining what personal protective equipment or other COVID-19 health and safety measures will be required by students and instructors;
- Ensuring that proper physical distancing is maintained in classroom, laboratory and studio spaces;
- Ensuring that handwashing and hand sanitizing stations are appropriately placed and marked; and
- Providing students and instructors with a detailed document that outlines expectations, recommendations and any restrictions related to being on campus for in-person coursework.

Should COVID-19 surge or re-emerge in the fall/early winter, or if a positive case is confirmed on-campus, the University will consult with the Chief Medical Health Officer as to appropriate actions, for example, suspend labs/studios for a period of time and engage in disinfection measures. The actions taken are context dependent. As part of the plan for offering low-density on-campus course
components, the Deans have been asked to ensure there is an alternative plan in place for students and faculty should there be a COVID-19 event.

As academic units develop safety plans for any in-person coursework, the University’s In-Person Course Assessment Team (IPCAT – whose membership is listed at the end of this document) will help them:

- Evaluate the number of students who can be accommodated in the teaching space;
- Determine the best possible way for students to access buildings and teaching spaces, limiting the movement of people so disinfection measures can be undertaken efficiently and effectively;
- Readjust scheduling, as needed and in consultation with the Registrar, regarding both time and space to avoid unnecessary hallway congestion;
- Evaluate physical space between coursework locations to avoid “pinch points” that make physical distancing difficult; and
- Establish a robust schedule for classroom and other facility sanitization and disinfection (e.g. washrooms, laboratory equipment, and public computers).

**Low-Density, In-Person Courses**

The University will pilot a small number of low-density course components (primarily labs and studios) that are pedagogically resistant to remote delivery, may require specialized equipment, and are crucial to allow students to graduate in the near future. These pilot on-campus offerings will take place only at the main Regina campus and the Federated Colleges, and not in Saskatoon or Prince Albert.

- Should the Regional Colleges or other affiliated institutions wish to deliver University of Regina courses or academic supports for such courses, those courses and related activities would be expected to comply with the University’s COVID-19 regulations and restrictions on in-person teaching.

**Determining In-Person, On-Campus courses**

To determine what in-person, on-campus courses might be held for Fall 2020 in keeping with provincial health guidelines, AIR provided a criteria document and assessment form to the deans/directors. Criteria for determining what courses might be feasible for in-person delivery included:

- Courses requiring specialized equipment, space, or software that is available only on campus;
• Courses with a section enrolment limit of 15 or fewer students;
• Courses that resist remote delivery and which students may require to complete their program/degree in the Fall term;
• Courses whereby virtual conversion is greatly challenged;
• Courses that have not already been developed as an online/web/remote course; and
• Courses whose instructors are available and willing to teach in-person.

An additional criterion in the criteria document and assessment form was “equity.” Deans/directors were asked to address who could attend in-person on-campus courses – and who could not attend. For those students who cannot attend but require the in-person classes, an individual academic plan for program completion will need to be developed by each faculty/department. Also, some students may be concerned about returning to in-person on-campus courses because they or a family member may be immunocompromised. They will make use of the University’s existing student accommodation processes to address their request for accommodation.

• Prospective students will be contacted by academic units to ensure that:
  ▪ They are geographically proximal to the University;
  ▪ They are safe to participate in the in-person courses; and
  ▪ Their Fall schedules permit on-campus access.

• Individual faculty members/instructors will also be consulted to address any concerns they may have with respect to teaching in person. Some may have a compromised immune system, have a family member who is immunocompromised, or have other vulnerabilities within their lives. They will use the University’s existing faculty and staff accommodation processes to address their request for accommodation.

Based on the provided criteria document and the assessment form, the deans/directors then provided AIR with individual lists of potential courses, labs and studios that might be held in-person. IPCAT is currently evaluating those aggregated lists. IPCAT is developing a holistic view of which in-person courses can be offered in Fall 2020 based on additional important factors such as space capacity given physical distancing, the entry and exit doors closest to labs/studios, the one-way movement of students through space (hallways and stairwells, for example), the need to coordinate facility sanitization and disinfection, and the use of elevators and washrooms.

• When finalized, the list of in-person course components to be offered for Fall 2020 will be provided to all academic units, entered into the University’s course registration system, and posted on the Fall 2020 section of the University’s website.
• All selected in-person course components will have plans in place to manage a localized lockdown, surge or resurgence of COVID-19 during the Fall 2020 term.
Student practica, Co-op placements, and other field-based learning

A process has been developed to allow student practica, Co-operative Education placements and other field-based learning to take place in person both on- and off-campus. In all cases, students will be placed only with employers and other organizations that commit to following the applicable jurisdiction’s COVID-19 health precautions. Individual field-based learning opportunities themselves may also be altered in light of COVID-19.

Communicating with the University and larger communities

In the coming weeks, University Advancement & Communications will roll out a clear communication plan for the Fall 2020 term to keep the University and the larger community well-informed both prior to and during the term.

Limited low-density in-person teaching and learning as a pilot initiative

Holding low-density in-person coursework in Fall 2020 will serve as a pilot initiative to determine how the University and Federated Colleges could eventually manage larger groups of students on our campuses and at the Regional Colleges and other partner institutions. The pilot will instruct us about “pinch points,” disinfection of spaces, safe movement of people through space and time, access to the Library, computer labs and other facilities, the use of personal protective equipment, elevators, timetabling, physical distancing, and other relevant matters. The University will then take the lessons learned and apply them to any in-person course offerings for subsequent terms.

Winter 2021 - A cautious approach contingent on several factors

Determining and communicating the approach to teaching and learning in an uncertain context

- At this time, it is not possible to determine a definitive approach to teaching and learning for Winter 2021; in all likelihood, however, most teaching and learning will take place at a distance.
- In any case, the approach to teaching and learning will be a cautious one and will be contingent on several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the province, its impact on public health guidelines, and the success of the Fall 2020 low-density in-person teaching and learning pilot initiative.
• The University will proceed cautiously because the institution differs markedly from other environments in the province that are fully re-opening. It has a high on-campus population density, for example, with close to 20,000 persons potentially on the main Regina campus alone (an area of a few square city blocks) during peak periods. Many of those people travel to and from campus from surrounding communities each day. The average student or instructor can share classroom space with hundreds of others in any given week. In addition, there are hundreds of “pinch points” on campus such as elevators, stairwells, hallways, washrooms and common areas. These are located in multiple buildings.

• Carefully taking into account these factors, in the coming months the University will develop a teaching and learning plan for Winter 2021 that is consistent with a sector approach previously facilitated by the Ministry of Advanced Education and other Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions. Whatever plan is developed, it must adhere to provincial COVID-19 public health guidelines.

• The plan for Winter 2021 will be communicated to the University and the larger community as early as possible to allow adequate time to plan for Winter 2021.

Moving Forward Safely, Carefully, and Consultatively

This framework provides guidance for teaching and learning in the 2020-2021 academic year at the University of Regina, Federated Colleges and partner institutions in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It does so, however, with the understanding that the uncertain nature of the pandemic will require institutions to continuously assess and periodically revise their coordinated approach, particularly as the Winter 2021 term approaches. At all times, this planning will be done carefully, taking into account the important perspectives as well as the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff.

Over this academic year and beyond, the University of Regina, Federated Colleges, and our partners will undoubtedly face challenges and uncertainties as we live in the presence of COVID-19. But how we respond together to these challenges – safely, carefully, and consultatively – will allow us to move forward successfully as we continue the practice of teaching and learning at our institutions.
Teaching and Learning Working Group: Academic Incremental Recovery (AIR)

- (Chair) Dr. David Gregory, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
- Amy Hunter, Special Projects Administrator
- Art Exner, Associate Vice-President Information Services
- Dr. Bob Kayseas, Interim President, First Nations University of Canada
- Brett Waytuck, University Librarian
- Darren Cherwaty, Director, Health, Safety and Wellness
- Doug Cripps, Associate Dean, Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies
- Glenys Sylvestre, Executive Director University Governance and University Secretary
- Dr. Harvey King, Director, Centre for Continuing Education
- James D’arcy, University Registrar
- Jayveer Chadva, University of Regina Graduate Students’ Association
- Dr. Jim Farney, Faculty of Arts
- Lisa Mitchell, Associate Vice-President University Advancement and Communications
- Neil Paskewitz, Associate Vice-President Facilities Management
- Dr. Nick Jones, Interim Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and Associate Vice-President (Research)
- Nifemi Adekoya, University of Regina Students Union
- Dr. Nilgün Önder, Associate Vice-President (Academic)
- Pat Patton, Director, Security and Operations
- Regan Seidler, Coordinator, Enterprise Risk Management
- Dr. Stephen King, Senior Researcher
- Dr. Tom Phenix, Dean, Campion College
- Dr. Yvonne Petry, Dean, Luther College

In-Person Course Assessment Team (IPCAT)

- (Chair) Dr. David Gregory, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
- Amy Hunter, Special Projects Administrator
- Darren Cherwaty, Director, Health, Safety and Wellness
- Dr. Esam Hussein, Dean, Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science
- Dr. Harvey King, Director, Centre for Continuing Education
- James D’arcy, University Registrar
- Rae Staseson, Dean, Media, Art and Performance
- Neil Paskewitz, Associate Vice-President Facilities Management
- Pat Patton, Director, Security and Operations
- Regan Seidler, Coordinator, Enterprise Risk Management
- Dr. Stephen King, Senior Researcher