

From: [Summers, Greg](#)
Subject: Academic Affairs Update, 12-04-20
Date: Friday, December 04, 2020 11:28:43 AM
Attachments: [Workgroup Recommendations Final, 12-01-20.docx](#)
[Update on Spring Classes.msg](#)

Colleagues,

As you know, a faculty/student workgroup has been reviewing feedback from the campus community regarding how we all experienced this fall semester and crafting recommendations for changes we might consider for the spring term ahead. Their report is attached. It was endorsed by both the Common Council and the SGA at their respective meetings this week, and we will begin moving forward with their recommendations.

Among the most significant suggestions is that faculty be permitted to teach in the modality in which the course is scheduled, meaning that if a course is offered at a scheduled time in-person or in a virtual classroom, students should be expected to attend class at these times. As a reminder, based on the recommendations of our faculty workgroups last spring, I had asked faculty this fall to prepare asynchronous online options for all in-person and virtual classroom learning experiences. This was a heavy lift for faculty, but we felt it was important to be prepared to serve students who did not wish to attend in person or who might have to quarantine during the semester. Although the strategy proved effective in this regard, there were unintended consequences as well. In practice, too many students utilized these online options in ways that undermined student engagement in classes and complicated students' ability to balance school, work, and other life responsibilities. The lack of attendance in in-person and virtual courses, in turn, impacted student engagement and likely their academic success. As a result, we are shifting our approach just a bit.

This morning, with the approval of incoming Chancellor Gibson, I sent the attached message to students letting them know that, if they are scheduled for an in-person or virtual classroom, they will be expected to participate in these modalities at the scheduled times. However, I also reassured students that, whenever possible, faculty and instructors would still provide flexibility in how they participate in these classes.

As I explained to students, what this means in practice is that faculty should continue to provide alternative means of participating to students who are ill or need to quarantine. In addition, I strongly encourage everyone to accommodate those students who are unable or feel unsafe attending classes in person. As you'll note, I asked students to contact their instructors directly and in advance if they felt they needed this kind of flexibility. Beyond this encouragement, however, the choice to provide online options rests with the faculty members teaching their courses.

We should be aware that this change may cause anxiety among students, especially those who

came to depend on this flexibility to manage health concerns, maintain jobs and financial security, and assist family members with challenges caused by the pandemic. The months ahead will be difficult for everyone, and our students are sure to continue struggling with these kinds of issues. I know you will all do your best to assist students in navigating the concerns that may arise.

Let me conclude by thanking the members of the faculty/student workgroup who took time to review campus feedback and make recommendations for improvement. Their names are included in their attached report.

Thanks very much. Have a safe weekend, everyone.

Greg

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(This message is being sent to the Academic Affairs Faculty/Staff list.)