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## Fall Teaching and Learning Information, July 10, 2020

University of Northern Iowa

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# University of Northern Iowa

## Fall Teaching and Learning Information

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Dear Colleagues,

As you know, our students, who were asked to leave campus abruptly in March, have been missing you tremendously. We have received this feedback repeatedly in the surveys we have conducted and in messages they have shared. This is not surprising news. Students come to UNI because of the faculty they get to work with both inside and outside the classroom. The residential, engaged learning experience that you provide is our niche—it is what makes the University of Northern Iowa learning experience unique.

The fall semester will provide new challenges to all of us as we figure out how to navigate the uncertainty of what we are facing. I want to start by acknowledging this uncertainty and the anxiety that some are experiencing. As the administrative team in Academic Affairs has been meeting with Faculty Leaders, we have discussed the disruption that we are facing and the challenges it offers us.

In this light, I am writing to offer the latest guidance on how we will conduct our teaching and learning this coming semester. This guidance includes the direction and decisions of the Forward Together steering committee and subcommittees, Deans' Council, Faculty Leaders, and Faculty Senate, as well as various federal, state, and local agencies. While some of this information has already been shared, most of it is new.

This communication is lengthy and detailed, but it is important for you to read it all the way through so that you can begin to prepare for fall. Implementing the changes that are planned will take the hard work, creativity, and generosity of our entire community. I want to tell you, in advance, that I appreciate these efforts greatly.

### **Academic Calendar**

Our primary goal for the fall semester has not changed: prioritizing the health and safety of the campus community while assisting students in making progress towards their degrees. In all cases, we have emphasized our mission in our decision-making process and have consulted widely and collaboratively. For instance, we consulted with Faculty Senate in altering the fall calendar. As has already been announced, it will be modified as follows:

- Monday, August 17 – Classes begin

- Monday, September 7 (Labor Day) – Classes will be held
- Friday, November 20 – Regular classes end
- Saturday, November 21 and Monday, November 23 through Wednesday November 25 – Final exam period
  - It will be important that we recognize and honor those who hold their Sabbath on Saturdays and schedule make-up exams for them if they request it
- Wednesday, December 9 by 1:00 – Grades are due
- Saturday, December 19 – Commencement

Additionally, the week of November 30 to December 4 will be available for make-up exams for students who cannot attend the scheduled finals due to university excused absences. This may include student athletes who were already scheduled to travel for competition during the Thanksgiving holiday and other students who are impacted by the new calendar. No regularly scheduled activities can occur during this period and students who are able to take exams or turn in final assignments during the scheduled time must do so. Only make-up work for students who must miss the scheduled exam period can occur during that week. You are encouraged to consider online exam options during this make-up period to avoid the need for traveling back to campus.

All deadlines for the semester (drop/add, withdrawal, etc.) have been adjusted to the appropriate date based on the new calendar. These dates can be found on the [University Calendar](#).

Students engaged in non-arranged activities that require time beyond the new end date (e.g. internships, field experiences, student teaching) should be allowed to continue to the conclusion of these activities. Finally, incomplete grades will be used to extend the period as needed; please work with your department head as you consider offering incompletes and be sure students understand what they will need to do to complete the course and how much time they get to do so.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

In the midst of all of these challenges, I ask that we remain mindful of the challenges that our faculty, staff, and students of color may be experiencing. Diversity is a key element in the university's Vision Statement, which should continue to drive our work together. As we have held Deans' Council meetings, Academic Positioning meetings, as we have considered how we will recruit and support students, we have continued to expand our knowledge of white privilege, the way in which it frames our systems, practices, and structures, and how we must dislodge current mental models in order to realize the university's Vision and the dream of our democracy.

As such, please consider how you can advance the work of equity at UNI in the coming year, and how we can reimagine our work together to investigate our underlying systems. This could include within your courses:

- Ensure that any modifications to how you teach don't inadvertently disadvantage certain groups of students.
- Recognize that everyone has lives and commitments that extend beyond classes, and with these disruptions those complexities have grown; treat everyone with grace.
- Be mindful of current events and how your instruction might intersect with our students' and colleagues' responses surrounding them.

We will also be exploring ways in which we can adjust our recruitment, admissions, retention, and leadership development work for our students of color so that we can demonstrate our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Now, more than ever, this work must be our work together as a community.

### **Health and Safety Practices: Classroom Capacity**

We are in the process of rescheduling the rooms for our fall classes in order to enhance the physical distancing that students will experience in our classrooms. We expect this rescheduling to be accomplished soon and will send out an announcement at that time. Our goals in this rescheduling process include the following:

- Classes will be scheduled so that no more than 40% of room capacity will be used if possible.
- First year classes have been prioritized for face-to-face instruction.
- Generally, classes of more than 50 students will not meet together in person. Faculty with classes of greater than 50 students, or classes that cannot be placed in an appropriately sized room, will be presented options for changing their course including, but not limited to:
  - Changing to fully online instruction
  - Changing to a hybrid format that meets with smaller groups of the class on a rotation, when a suitable classroom can be located.
- Once these changes are made to the schedule, individual faculty will be notified and various options will be made available to them.

Facilities will be marking or removing furniture to help enhance the physical distancing in our classes.

Given that our students are excited to be back on campus and interact with each other and with faculty, we are working as hard as possible to maintain at least 80% of our classes in a face-to-face format. More information is provided below regarding the modality of class delivery and how to make a request for online or hybrid teaching.

### **Health and Safety Practices: Face Coverings**

Out of care and concern for all members of our campus community, the University of Northern Iowa will require everyone on our campus to wear a face covering (cloth mask or shield) while in campus buildings. This includes students, faculty, staff members, and guests. Face coverings or shields are required in outdoor settings when six feet or more of social distancing cannot be maintained.

Face coverings or shields are not required while:

- Alone in a private room or private office.
- Eating or drinking, and 6' of physical distancing is maintained.
- Within your workspace if 6' of physical distancing is maintained.

Two face coverings and one face shield will be available for all faculty and staff who request them. Individuals can request their items from the UNI Bookstore by presenting their university identification card. After August 10, they will also be available in Essentials.

Educational materials are in development for all faculty, staff, and students, along with a statement of compliance for these requirements. To ensure everyone understands the shared responsibility we have, all members of the campus community will be required to engage with online educational materials prior to the start of the fall semester. Additional materials, such as posters, table tents, and social media posts, will also be developed.

Our subcommittees, Faculty Leaders, and Faculty Senate have crafted a statement for all syllabi for the fall semester regarding the face covering requirement. Faculty should include the following statement on their syllabi:

Protecting our campus from COVID-19 depends on all of us acting with care and responsibility. To protect each other and our campus community, we are required to wear masks or face shields that cover our mouths and noses inside all campus buildings, including throughout the duration of class. We are asked to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms, stay away from others and seek medical attention if we're not feeling well and/or experience any symptoms such as a fever over 100.4, and to communicate and plan proactively to make up for missed learning. We will maintain physical distancing by sitting in designated areas in the classroom. Failure to follow these requirements can result in students being referred to the [student conduct process](#) and faculty being referred to the Associate Provost for Faculty. We take these steps together recognizing that my mask protects you, your mask protects me, and together wearing masks protects the entire UNI community. Our collective actions will determine our ability to remain together in an in-person learning environment.

Additionally, these groups have consulted on the consequences of a student's or employee's failure to comply with these requirements. If a student does not wear a face covering (cloth or shield) throughout the class period, faculty should ask them first to put on a face covering. If they do not comply they should be asked to leave class and be referred to the student conduct process.

In general, the Student Conduct Code and the student conduct process are intended to be educational. Students who fail to do the following may be referred to the student conduct process, within 24 hours, for an alleged violation of the Student Conduct Code:

- Adhere to the reasonable requests of faculty, staff, or peers to wear a face covering
- Responsibly engage in social distancing
- Follow isolation or quarantine requirements
- Uphold the COVID-19 Student Commitment.

Sanctions for students can include warnings; fines from \$25 to \$250; loss of privileges like participation in student organizations; removal from classes, housing, and/or other campus spaces; and suspension.

Students unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition or other protected reason should contact [Student Accessibility Services](#).

If a faculty member does not comply with the expectation of wearing a face covering or fails to enforce this expectation in the classroom, a student can make the choice to leave the classroom without penalty and/or refer the incident to Human Resource Services. Employees unable to wear a face covering or shield due to a medical condition or other protected reason should contact [Human Resource Services](#).

### **Health and Safety Practices: Classroom Cleaning and Hygiene**

We are planning several very important changes to our cleaning practices for the fall that will enhance the safety of our campus community. These plans include:

- Every classroom and learning space will undergo enhanced cleaning and disinfection by custodial crew once every day.
- Where possible, we will change our HVAC systems to non-recirculating air to bring more fresh air into classrooms and common spaces.
- Students should be encouraged not to congregate outside between classes as much as possible.
- Students should not linger at building or room entry and exit points.
- Cleaning supplies will be available in each classroom for individual use.

In order to provide campus with this information, we are developing educational and training materials for different audiences, including students, staff, and faculty on our health practices.

### **Important Faculty Practices for Fall 2020**

Several very important practices will need to be adhered to this fall in order for us to launch and manage a successful semester. These include:

- **Faculty Illness:** In order to accommodate faculty who may need to step out of their classes due to illness, self-isolation, or quarantine, faculty should develop contingency plans to deliver classes online or through some other means that will continue their classes. Additionally, departments should develop contingency plans to take over classes if a faculty member becomes seriously ill or is quarantined for an extended period of time.
- **Blackboard:** Faculty are asked to use Blackboard for all classes, minimally to post the syllabus and other course handouts, readings, and materials, and as the

primary means to communicate with students. The feedback we heard from students this spring was that they struggled with the multiple methods that faculty used to continue their courses or communicate with them. As much as possible, having one method for communicating important information to students is essential to their success.

- **Syllabus Guidelines:** Each syllabus should follow the best practices as presented in Appendix C of the [Faculty Handbook](#). In addition to the statements on non-discrimination and accessibility, the new statement (above) regarding face coverings should be added to all syllabi.
- **Seating Charts:** Every class will need to utilize a seating chart for their classes. This is a necessary component of our ability to work with Black Hawk County on contact tracing should a student test positive for COVID-19. Failure to have a seating chart may result in the quarantining of the entire class should someone have a positive test.
- **Parallel Planning of all classes:** As noted in my email to all faculty in April, faculty should conduct parallel planning for their fall classes. This imperative is even more important now, recognizing that faculty may need to step out of their courses and that faculty will need to be prepared to assist students who need to stop out for a period, as well as for other contingencies. This parallel planning extends to field experiences and other hands-on or engaged learning.
- **Consider Bandwidth:** As you develop your courses, you are encouraged to use educational technologies that have a lower bandwidth to provide access to those students who have older laptops or limited WiFi. Please reference the UNI eLearning Suite page on [Remote Possibilities](#).
- **Student Absences:** For all classes, if a student must quarantine or self-isolate, or is absent due to illness, faculty will need to accommodate them so that they can maintain their successful progress in their course. Faculty can do that through several means of alternative instruction or assignments, at their discretion: lecture capture, Zoom rooms, individual meetings, etc.
- **Class Attendance Policy:** Finally, we have consulted with Faculty Senate on Policy 3.06 Class Attendance and Make-up Work. They have endorsed an addendum to this policy recognizing the seriousness of the situation we are in. Faculty should accommodate student absences for illness, quarantine and self-isolation, and other considerations during this time.
  - Absences related to COVID-19 illness, self-isolation, or quarantine. Faculty teaching face-to-face must be prepared to also offer online instruction and/or have assignment alternatives for individual students who are unable to attend class due to COVID-related issues. This should also extend to field experiences that students may not be able to attend for the same reasons.

In order to provide support for faculty as they negotiate parallel planning or changes to their fall teaching mode of delivery, we will continue to have professional development, as outlined below.

### **Fall Delivery Modalities: Face-to-Face, Hybrid, and Online**

As noted, a new fall schedule will be published soon, with new classrooms that will offer faculty the opportunity to meet with their students in rooms that utilize, as much as possible, 40% capacity of the room or less. Once published, please work with your department head on the modality that best suits your class, works with program needs, and meets the desire of the students to have a predominantly face-to-face schedule. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has resources to help faculty determine hybrid options and the best option for courses that cannot meet in full in a face-to-face format.

We are hopeful that by changing the academic calendar for fall we will be able to make it through the semester together, in our classrooms, learning and thriving. I recognize the challenges that this semester includes, but I also feel very confident in the team of faculty, staff, students, and administrators who have come together to determine how we can do this in a safe manner.

If a faculty member has a need to explore a shift in their mode of delivery to a hybrid or online format, please contact your department head by July 21. While we must keep in mind our students' desire to return to campus and meet with you in a face-to-face format, we must also recognize that some faculty and staff have a variety of health concerns and other vulnerabilities that need to be accommodated. Faculty are not required to disclose medical conditions to department heads; if a faculty member needs a medical or other accommodation, please contact Melissa Ward in Human Resource Services. **If you desire any changes to your fall schedule, please work with your department head or HRS before July 21.** Department heads will need to consider programmatic needs as they make decisions about changes in mode of delivery.

Office hours can also be held virtually so as to reduce exposure and maintain the health and safety of our campus. Faculty can set up appointment slots in [Google Calendar](#).

### **Professional Development Opportunities**

As you know, we conducted a large number of professional development opportunities for faculty this summer in preparation for the fall semester. The participation for these workshops has been robust. In addition to the approximately 200 faculty who have complete Quality Matters (QM) training in the past, we have new faculty members who have taken advantage of this professional development.

- 70 faculty completed the comprehensive QM 2-day Course Design Workshop
- 20 faculty completed the QM Teaching Online Workshop (with two more workshops scheduled in July/August; + 48 seats)
- 12 faculty are pursuing the QM Peer Review Certification
- 80 faculty have requested Blackboard access to QM Essentials Tutorial.

More importantly, additional professional development opportunities will be available for all faculty, not just those who will be teaching online. We will be offering workshops that include QM Design Essentials, Online Teaching Tools (ETS), QM Online Teaching Essentials. We have a wide variety of workshops that include information about



universal design, online tools, library resources, lessons learned and other aspects of teaching effectiveness in this challenging time.

Summer Professional Development Workshop topics, dates, and times can be found on the [Professional Development Opportunities](#) website, which is updated regularly. More information will be coming soon.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for reading to the end of this lengthy document. I recognize that a great deal is being asked of you this fall. We are asking you to balance your teaching and pedagogy with the challenges of the pandemic and our students' desires for a face-to-face learning experience. We are asking you to balance care of all of the individuals in our community, and of all of our physical, mental, and emotional health, along with the thriving of your professional careers. Finally, we are asking you to balance all of these challenges with care of your families, which often puts a greater burden on women and looks differently across racial and ethnic lines.

We have many other issues that we are still discussing, and others that we will take up this fall. These include such things as our annual tenure and promotion criteria and evaluation process; the extension of tenure clocks; grading policies; accessibility issues; and how we will advance equity work in this time.

I greatly appreciate your attention to this challenging work as we come together as a community to advance our mission. And, most importantly, I look forward to seeing you back on campus this fall.

Be well,  
Jim