

Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on COVID Academic Planning and Policies
MINUTES

Meeting of November 12th, 2021 at 8:30a.m. TEAMS Conferencing Application

Present: Chris Buddle (Co-Chair)
Angela Campbell (Co-Chair)
Jennifer Chen
Nancy Czettel
Claire Downie
Rebecca Fuhrer
Petra Rohrbach
Laura Winer
Gillian Nycum (resource person)
Elyse Cragg (communications)
Paola Colapelle (secretary)

Guests: Dr. Bronwen E. Low
Dr. Adam Dubé

Regrets: Daniel Weinstock

General updates:

- The committee was informed that based on their recommendation and after consultation with Faculties, the online form for students to request academic considerations will remain in place for the Winter 2022 term.
- The Course Delivery parameters for Winter 2022 was passed at a special Academic Policy Committee Meeting on Friday 5 November and will be presented as part of the APC report to Senate on 17 November.
- The most recent data on students taking only online courses for the winter term was discussed and there are approximately 600 students in this category, which is less than anticipated.

Communication Update:

The Committee was informed that an article will be published in the upcoming “What’s New (Students)”, “What’s New (Staff)” electronic newsletters. Strategies for distribution channels to reach students at Macdonald Campus will be explored and pursued. There will also be an article prepared for the December issue of the “Reporter” electronic journal, describing the mandate of this Committee and outlining deliverables and plans for the next term.

Accommodations for students:

The focus of the meeting on November 12th was on specific possible solutions to support instructors with online teaching for students requesting COVID-related accommodations. This was a follow-up to last week’s discussion and focused on the approach of simple technological approaches to ‘live stream’ a lecture to students who cannot come to campus due to incidental absences due to COVID-19.

Recommended solutions will serve as a basis to create a resource guide for instructors to use the proposed online teaching methods. Communications and information sessions to support instructors will be held before the start of the Winter 2022 term.

Dr. Winer, Director of Teaching and Learning Services, presented a framework for recommendations in terms of format, equipment, and resource requirements as well as planning and logistics for online training sessions. The Co-Chairs will soon have an update on possible resources to support this initiative.

Format

Recommendations on possible online teaching options are based on current and new methods.

Those for which instructions and reference materials are readily available and presently used are:

- Recordings with the lecture recording system
- Information on how to record in non-LRS equipped classrooms

The proposed new format is:

- Online Synchronous Participation (“OSP”) – a simple approach where equipment required is an ethernet cable, webcam, and microphone. Tutorial links on how to connect external cameras and microphones will be made available.
- The committee viewed the terminology to be appropriate (Online Synchronous Participation, OSP)) and the approach was viewed positively.
- It was noted that this approach would not be mandated for instructors, but rather is one option available should instructors wish to use this approach to help with short-term accommodation needs for students.

Resources, planning and logistics

- Request for a Teaching Assistant or co-instructor to moderate the online incoming questions is an option for some, or perhaps “remote learning assistants” (RLAs). A possible alternative would be to whether if students in the class might assist with this.
- Set-up of equipment in advance, take a picture of the initial set-up
- Enable Zoom recording during class
- Remind participants to repeat questions
- Have learning activities such as icebreakers, peer-assessments, collaborative white board activities – tools, links and information based on learning strategy will be provided.

Committee members were joined by Prof. Bronwen Low and Prof. Adam Dubé, from the Faculty of Education, to present their experience with classroom set-ups that achieved OSP. Recommendations made were to ensure student participation, active learning, and a focus on encouraging student activities and group work. It was determined that methods described provide many advantages for a dynamic interaction-type online class. It was noted that students appreciated the online learning experience as an accommodation and recognized the high-value of in-person learning experience.

It is clear, however, that instructor’s ease of use with technology will be a factor to consider, and not everyone will be comfortable with the approach described. It is also not ‘plug and play’; OSP requires time and effort to do effectively, especially if the instructor seeks to have engaging ‘two-way’ teaching opportunities with students who are online versus the more straightforward ‘one-way’ OSP.

Prof. Low and Dubé noted that students understood OSP as an accommodation, and recognized the continued clear value of in-person experiences. Students preferred to attend in person, but felt it advantageous to have an option for OSP if they had to stay home for COVID-related reasons.

It was agreed that proactive solutions to provide support documentation and guidance to instructors are required.

The focus of next week's meeting will be on accommodations for instructors.