

Fall 2020 Planning Update - Discussion Document for GFC

May 6, 2020

Introduction

The [Fall 2020 Planning Group](#) is developing a unified approach to identify all functions and operations necessary for the university to fulfil its mission as of the fall 2020 Academic Term.

Following the lead of the academic and research impact teams, four subgroups are moving quickly to assess the benefits, implications, and risks associated with several scenarios.

Vision (previously published)

The University of Alberta will continue to provide the best possible learning experience for its students and maximize its research and service activities.

The university will adopt operational models and capitalize on opportunities and lessons learned to retain and enhance the position of the University of Alberta as a leading global research university.

The university will use this period to drive innovation, efficiency, and relevance.

See the principles and assumptions contained in the full [Fall Semester Scenario Planning document](#).

Current state of Emergency:

- Global health restrictions remain with some countries beginning to loosen restrictions while maintaining physical distancing rules.
- Some Canadian provinces have begun to loosen restrictions while maintaining physical distancing rules.
- Alberta remains under a state of public health emergency.
- The University of Alberta remains in a state of emergency (Level 3) as identified in the university's Integrated Emergency Master Plan.
- As the first major country to emerge from COVID-19 lockdowns, China is focusing on preventing a second wave of infections with the continuation of stringent physical distancing rules, the requirement for facemasks, and rigorous monitoring protocols.
- While some countries are loosening internal restrictions, travel entry bans remain in place for the vast majority of countries.
- The concerns of a second wave of COVID-19 remain with the view that it would be far more dire because of the likelihood that it will coincide with the start of the fall flu season.

Planning [Scenarios](#) (previously published)

The planning group is focused on three broad scenarios:

- Limited in-person instruction permitted, non-essential research allowed, international students here, campuses are open.
- Limited in-person instruction, non-essential research allowed, international students NOT here, campuses are open.
- No in-person instruction, essential research only, international students not here, campuses are closed.

Sector Trends

Universities across the world are struggling to decide which learning model should be adopted for Fall 2020. Many universities are moving to an early May decision point that leans towards remote delivery; others are trying to wait as long as possible in the hope that all restrictions are lifted. Efforts are underway to coordinate a decision across the U-15.

Factors and limitations that must inform the overall direction

The creation of an academic class schedule involves 3,400 courses and 7,800 sections, affecting 41,000 students. The university does not have the physical space to accommodate class sizes capped at 50 or 100. Although the university may be able to accommodate class size restrictions of 250, it would not be able to maintain physical distancing outside of the classroom.

Other considerations relating to having students on campus include:

- Resource levels will restrict our capacity to deliver both in-class and remote delivery formats while maintaining the quality of the learning experience.
- Faculty and staff need sufficient time to plan and develop program materials, adopt and complete the necessary training, and implement required IT and infrastructure supports.
- Many students have already registered for the Fall 2020 term and developed their course calendars to meet their program requirements. If all courses and sections were rescheduled to allow for smaller class sizes, many students could face course conflicts and be unable to meet their program requirements or progress to graduation.
- Some international students who wish to begin studies on campus in the fall may not have this option due to travel restrictions or difficulties in obtaining study permits/visas. International students account for 15 percent and 40 percent of our undergraduate and graduate student populations, respectively. This makes some form of remote instruction in most programs a necessity.
- In addition to meeting physical distancing requirements within classrooms, the university must also manage physical distancing during class changeovers, in libraries, food service spaces and other contexts. Constraints in building design make physical distancing impossible in certain areas, even with maximal efforts to stagger class times.
- Although the provision of class sizes of 50 or less cannot be accommodated in large faculties, there may be some self contained programs that would be able to explore a blended learning option in line with partially relaxed public health directives. Recent research shows that smaller class sizes do not appreciably reduce the interconnectedness of students on a campus. Even with careful

efforts to ensure distancing in classes, therefore, there is considerable risk of disease transmission through the natural interactions among students.

- While some graduate students may be on campus to attend some small classes and conduct laboratory work, the majority of their classes would be delivered remotely.
- In the event that a second wave of infections coincides with the annual flu season, public health officials could be expected to reinstate very restrictive measures, including closure for up to 14 days.
- The University of Alberta is a very complex, multi-campus, diverse program institution with extensive and multifaceted research, all of which require significant resources to support. This results in needing a variety of solutions which have to remain flexible - one-size will not fit all eventualities.

A possible direction, for discussion

Emphasizing the need to balance optimal program delivery with the extreme uncertainty associated with the ongoing pandemic and the risk of committing to what could quickly become an unsustainable direction, the Fall 2020 Planning Group offers the following, for discussion:

- Remote learning is the primary delivery mode for the vast majority of undergraduate and graduate level courses.
- Face-to-face instruction is the standard for clinical courses, lab courses where remote instruction is not feasible, studio courses, research related instruction, simulation labs, and a limited number of others where public health requirements can be met.
- The small number of faculties and programs that are completely contained (i.e. no service teaching to other programs), and can comply with public health requirements, may be able to deliver programming through in-person instruction if current restrictions are eased.
- International students who are unable to travel to Canada, or who, for personal reasons, wish to study from their home countries in the Fall 2020 term, are accommodated through remote delivery. Consideration will need to be given for assessment methods given the potential for significant time zone differences and varied internet quality.
- Students and instructors who are immuno-compromised or live with at risk populations, receive appropriate supports to ensure their safety.
- Graduate students would attend campus to the maximum extent possible in order to advance the research components of their programs and more readily hold assigned TA and RA-ships. The majority of graduate courses would be delivered remotely.
- Computer labs, libraries and some student services are open to the extent they can ensure compliance with public health restrictions.
- A limited number of residences are open to support students from outside of Edmonton, as long as they can comply with public health restrictions.

Key Items for Consideration by GFC

As identified in the above set of discussion points, GFC will need to focus discussion and advice on the following:

1. Delivery mechanisms.
2. Academic Schedule modification.

Other key considerations

Members of the university community, regardless of their role as instructors, learners or support staff, must be confident that their safety is a paramount concern of the university.

Substantial uncertainty regarding the containment of the virus and governments' response will persist throughout the planning process and into the delivery of the fall term and potentially the winter term as well.

There must be sufficient flexibility in the plan to respond to a highly complex and changing environment where public health orders will continue to exist in different forms for many months.

Timing

While the implementation of many of our decisions will not occur until Fall 2020 or later, the Planning Group recommends that, due to the size and complexity of the university, direction on the overall program-delivery direction be clearly given as soon as possible. This will help ensure faculty and staff have sufficient time to undertake the difficult and unprecedented change required for Fall 2020 and permit the coordination and allocation of key support resources to the areas that require assistance to meet the desired outcomes.

Evaluation and decision making

As the province and university continue in a state of emergency, current university emergency decision making authorities reside with the President. Consistent with the practice at many other U15 universities, the final decisions about planning for the fall 2020 term will be made by the President, Provost and the Deans, however, throughout the planning process the university will continue to actively engage the university community and representative bodies such as GFC (or its standing committees) seeking their active input as much as possible.