

St. Stephen's College

Winter 2022 Courses Online, and Return to In-Person Courses Delayed until May 2022

22 December 2021

To: All St. Stephen's College Faculty, Staff, and Students

Regarding: Winter 2022 Courses to be Delivered Online

We again find ourselves navigating familiar though still uncertain waters. As we are all aware, the advent of the COVID-19 Omicron variant brings much uncertainty and caution across many sectors of our world. Again, COVID case-numbers are escalating across both the globe and here in Canada. Though Alberta has not yet felt the full impact of the Omicron variant, our learnings over the past 20+ months suggest that we are wise to proceed with caution as we navigate this new phase of the pandemic.

All SSC Winter 2022 Courses will be Online:

After meeting earlier this week with the faculty, **St. Stephen's College has decided to pause our return to in-person learning and instead to continue to offer our courses via online, remote delivery until the end of April 2022.** This means that, with only a few exceptions (see below), all in-person courses between January–April 2022 will now be offered via online, remote delivery. All St. Stephen's practicums can continue in accordance with our Practicum Placements During COVID-19 guidelines.

The decision to pause our return to in-person learning was made for several reasons:

- (1) There still is much that is not yet known about the Omicron variant, but what is known is that it is highly contagious and spreads rampantly (for example, after only a few short weeks since the variant's discovery on November 24, 2021, Omicron has now spread around the world and has become the dominant strain of coronavirus in many places).
- (2) Given that just under half of our student body resides outside of the Greater Edmonton Area, it seems neither wise nor reasonable to require students to travel to and from St. Stephen's College at this time.
- (3) At the moment of writing this, the Omicron variant has now become the dominant variant in Alberta (representing more than half of all new cases), and it is anticipated that our provincial numbers will increase over the coming days and weeks.

Exceptions:

Following the direction of the University of Alberta, all UAlberta courses offered by St. Stephen's College (that is, SPRIT and CATS courses) will be delivered via online, remote delivery for the first three weeks of term (until January 23, 2021). Further instructions for faculty who teach SPRIT and CATS courses will be sent separately.

The St. Stephen's College Clinical Pastoral Education course, which is offered in conjunction with the Alberta Consortium for Supervised Pastoral Education, will be delivered via online, remote delivery for the first three weeks of term (until January 23, 2021). Further adjustments to this course's delivery method will be reviewed in consultation with the AC-SPE Provincial Coordinator.

Campus Closed to the Public while Faculty and Staff Work Remotely:

Effective January 4, 2022 and remaining in effect until at least January 23, 2022, campus will be closed to the public. The Faculty and Staff of St. Stephen's will work remotely, and only those who perform essential tasks will be required to come to campus. All College meetings and student advising will continue via video conference, though students will be able to access campus by appointment to conduct research.

Further Reflections:

Taking these steps today represents the best approach to protecting the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff. Delaying our return to in-person learning buys us the time we need not only to assess the new variant's potential impact, but also to weather any further COVID waves. These steps also support our healthcare systems and they reduce the transmissibility of COVID-19 due to travel, thus contributing to the overall wellbeing of our society.

Since the announcement on October 29, 2021 that the College would return to in-person course delivery in January 2022, our team has been working with great care and intention to prepare for our transition back to campus. This includes implementing an enhanced vaccination policy, revising our on-campus health and safety guidelines, and improving air purification at the College. Having done the work of implementing these precautions, the College is positioned well for our eventual return to campus. We expect and hope that this return will take place in May 2022.

For now, however, given how much is unknown regarding the Omicron variant, it is best that we proceed with care and with caution.

I am sure reaction to this announcement will come with mixed emotions. Perhaps a measure of disappointment. Perhaps a measure of relief. Perhaps a strange mixture of both disappointment and relief. The pandemic continues to pummel us with challenge after challenge, and together we need again to find the courage and the strength to face this new phase together. The decision to delay our return to in-person learning is made out of a profound sense of being in care of one another, of standing side-by-side with one another, and with a renewed and resolute sense of navigating these ever-changing waters with one another.

As always, if you have any questions or if you need any clarity regarding anything noted above, please reach out to me, the Registrar, or to your Department Chairs.

With thanks,
Fred Tappenden
Principal and Dean