

St. Stephen's College

Memo regarding Course Delivery for Remainder of 2021 (Spring/Summer and Fall Courses)

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

Regarding: Course Delivery for Remainder of 2021 (Spring/Summer and Fall)

This month marks one full year since the COVID-19 pandemic imposed itself upon our lives. This past year has been incredibly challenging for all of us, and every part of our living has been profoundly disrupted. As the vaccine rollout is now underway across the country, there is much hope that the darkest days of the pandemic will soon be behind us. Nevertheless, challenges persist. As we look ahead to the Spring/Summer 2021 and Fall 2021 semesters, there is much that is unknown regarding how quickly the vaccine will be distributed, when travel will again be reasonably accessible and safe, and how quickly public health guidelines will be eased.

The faculty at St. Stephen's College have been thinking deeply and working persistently on the College's ever-evolving response to the pandemic. One thing is clear: **St. Stephen's is committed to returning to in-person course delivery as soon as it is safe to do so.** As an educational institution, our pivot back to in-person learning will be done in step with all relevant public health guidelines, but also in a way that meets the particular challenges of the St. Stephen's student body. Our fundamental commitment remains the same; we are committed to protecting the health and wellbeing of our students, faculty, staff, and others within the St. Stephen's community.

After much deliberation and discussion, the Faculty Council of St. Stephen's College has decided on the following:

1. **Regarding Spring/Summer 2021:** All St. Stephen's courses from May–August 2021 will continue via remote, online delivery.
2. **Regarding Fall 2021:** St. Stephen's students and faculty should expect and plan that all courses from September–December 2021 will be delivered via remote, online delivery. Faculty Council will monitor the public health situation carefully and, if it is safe to do so, may approve a limited number of courses to return to in-person delivery. As this possibility comes into clearer focus, the College will work with instructors approximately three months prior to transitioning any course back to in-person delivery, and we will notify students not less than two months prior to the course start date.

As the College begins to look ahead to returning to in-person course delivery, there are a number of variables that we are monitoring and planning for, including:

- Travel Restrictions: Given the geographical distribution of our students (nearly half of whom live outside of the Greater Edmonton Area), our capacity to pivot back to in-person learning is tied to provincial, inter-provincial, and international travel.
- Indoor Social Gatherings: Currently, the Government of Alberta has banned all indoor gatherings. Because in-person learning is not only about time in the classroom but also about lunches, breaks, and other social interactions, our ability to return to in-person courses must comply with the provincial mandates regarding indoor gatherings.
- Vaccine Distribution: The speed at which the vaccine is distributed within Alberta and across the country directly affects our capacity to pivot back to in-person learning. The issue of

vaccine distribution is important for a number of reasons, two of which are: (a) many St. Stephen's students live across Canada (esp. BC, and others in Ontario, Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces), and thus the College must consider the pace of vaccine rollouts across the country; and (b) the age-diversity of St. Stephen's students (spanning late-20s through mid-60s) is such that any return to in-person learning must promote the wellbeing of those who are at higher risk of contracting the virus.

Despite these challenges, again I want to reiterate that St. Stephen's is committed to returning to in-person course delivery as soon as it is safe to do so.

I thank everyone who participated in our "Remote Delivery Survey." We had an overwhelming response to this survey: 80% response rate among students, and 70% among faculty. This survey is directly informing our Back to Campus plans, as well as informing our approach to remote course delivery for the duration of the pandemic. Among the key learnings and outcomes, the following are noteworthy:

- a. It was clear from the survey that both students and faculty want to return to in-person learning *only* when it is safe to do so.
 - a. Among students, 73.7% wish to stay online for the duration of the pandemic, and an additional 14.5% would like to return to in-person learning only when it is safe to do so.
 - b. Among faculty, 64.7% of faculty wish to stay online for the duration of the pandemic, and an additional 23.5% would like to return to in-person learning only when it is safe to do so.
- b. The courses that have been most challenging during the pandemic have been the applied-learning and skills-based courses. All of us at the College are aware of this reality and we are committed to returning these courses to in-person learning as soon as it is safe to do so.
- c. There were a number of excellent comments regarding the experiences of students and faculty during remote delivery courses. We are bringing these comments together into a list of recommendations of how to improve the educational experience of remote course delivery moving forward.
- d. The overwhelming theme among survey respondents was lament over what is lost in remote, online delivery; things such as the opportunity to build community, to have informal exchanges at lunch or in breaks, to connect with fellow students, faculty, and staff, and to come to the College as a way of 'getting away' (as it were) to study for a week. While we cannot emulate all of these in a remote-delivery context, the College has already begun taking steps toward hosting online gatherings and other opportunities to create community among our students and faculty.

Finally, I invite all students and faculty to review our website, where [all COVID-19 memos and other communications](#) can be accessed. I draw your attention specifically to the processes in place for accessing library resources during COVID-19. Library access is detailed in the [Library Access memo](#) sent to students and faculty on June 30, 2020, and additional information is also available in the [Library Services](#) section of our website.

With thanks,
Fred Tappenden,
Principal and Dean,
St. Stephen's College