

Navigating 2021W1: suggested guidance for syllabi.

The upcoming fall semester will present a variety of changing circumstances and challenges for our taught courses, impacting students, staff and faculty. Whilst we might be returning to campus, we are not yet returning to 'normal'; the semester will be transition towards that new normal, as a process over time not an event on a single date. The following offers some guidance and language for incorporation into course syllabi, with the need to modify as appropriate, according to the nature and details of the disciplinary context and the way the instructor / instructional team has designed the course.

Course structure

For courses based on primarily in-person instruction, the section of the syllabus that details the structure of the course should include details on how a student not able to be present for class(es) for a period can keep up with the work of the course. The circumstance that may lead students to be in this situation are varied, and can include:

- They may not be able to get to Vancouver in time for the start of the course;
- They may be isolating after arrival / feeling unwell at some point in the course;
- They may have different travel restrictions or regional health orders;

The kinds of questions students who find themselves in these situations will have will be:

- How can I keep up with class content?
- Will I be able to drop smaller course assignments without impacting my grade, or can I take an online version of an assessment instead?
- Will there be an option to take the MT / final online?

Addressing some of these in the syllabus for your own course will pre-emptively reduce student concerns and correspondence. Ways in which these students can be supported include:

- Provision of notes / materials online
- Capturing / streaming lecture sessions, or reusing video material from last year, where feasible
- Provision to take assessments online, where feasible.
- Increasing the 'safety net' for participation credit and / or assignments (e.g., only counting 70% of clicker responses towards participation grade; best 8 from 10 weekly assignments etc.)

It is important that the course structure – and in particular the way that the course is assessed - do not create pressure for students to feel like they have to attend if they feel unwell.

On vaccines

Excerpts from President Ono's message (Aug 26, 2021) regarding vaccines:

"We know that mandated masks and vaccines have been key concerns within our community and we have continued to express those concerns in our discussions with the provincial government. While we are aware that a significant majority of our campus community have already been vaccinated and all safety precautions are in place for September, we are working towards offering rapid testing for our community members who have not yet been vaccinated against COVID-19, or who choose not to disclose their vaccination status.

As a result, UBC will provide COVID-19 testing for all students, faculty and staff, with exemptions provided for those who are vaccinated against COVID-19. We will implement a process for confidential self-disclosure of vaccination status for all those who access our campuses, including students, faculty, staff and visitors."

"Proof of vaccination is not required for educational activities such as attending classes, orientation activities or other post-secondary activities. You can view the announcement at <https://broadcastemail.ubc.ca/2021/08/23/announcement-of-bc-vaccine-card-for-specific-activities>. Find out how to access your proof of vaccination at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/proof>."

You can view President Ono's message at <https://broadcastemail.ubc.ca>.

An individual's vaccine status is a matter of personal privacy.

- It is not appropriate to ask an individual about their vaccine status;
- It is not appropriate to ask students who are not vaccinated to sit in certain areas of the room;
- Mask wearing (or lack thereof) is not an indication of vaccine status or illness.

Example language (from Science)

"Covid Safety: For our in-person meetings in this class, it is important that all of us feel as comfortable as possible engaging in class activities while sharing an indoor space. Non-medical masks that cover our noses and mouths are a primary tool to make it harder for Covid-19 to find a new host. Please wear a non-medical mask during our class meetings, for your own protection, and the safety and comfort of everyone else in the class. If you have not yet had a chance to get vaccinated against Covid-19, vaccines are available to you, free and on campus [insert info if/when available]. The higher the rate of vaccination in our community overall, the lower the chance of spreading this virus. You are an important part of this community. Please arrange to get vaccinated if you have not already done so."

Mask wearing

The Provincial Health Officer, the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training, and the Minister of Education announced a new Public Health Order requiring non-medical masks came into effect on August 25, 2021 for all indoor public areas on both UBC campuses, including classrooms, labs, lobbies, hallways, stairwells, and elevators. The Order also applies to anyone taking public transportation, in a taxi or ride-sharing vehicle, and in many other settings (<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0053-001665>). Further details can be found at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/info/restrictions#masks>.

Classroom environment

It is appropriate (and a good idea) to request that students sit in broadly the same area of the room at each class, but a rigid seating plan is not necessary. It is perfectly sensible to increase ventilation in the classroom where this is feasible (eg open windows, doors etc).

It is acceptable to indicate that you do not wish to take questions at the podium at the end of the class (and if you do not, remind students that there are other mechanisms to ask questions, discuss the course with you, including office hours and discussion board etc.).

Care, compassion and wellbeing

During 2020, a guiding principle for how we approached the course redesigns and disruption from COVID19 was to foreground – to the extent that was feasible -- care and compassion in course design, delivery and assessment. The same principle still holds as we navigate the complexities of a return to campus.