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Colleagues,

Happy August! I'm writing with a midsummer update on the approaching fall semester.

Although we were all hoping to enter the fall with widespread vaccinations and the pandemic behind us, it seems likely that the rapid spread of the Delta variant will impact our campus and community. The situation is very much in flux. As you likely know, the CDC has recently updated [guidance for masking](#) to include vaccinated individuals living in areas of [substantial or high transmission](#). At present, campus policy continues to require only unvaccinated individuals to wear a face covering around others. This policy may be updated in the coming days or weeks, as Chancellor Gibson awaits further guidance from UW System and our county health partners. Please stay tuned.

I know that faculty and instructors are especially anxious for guidance regarding how to manage COVID-related classroom issues this fall. Although I can't provide a final set of expectations today, I do want to share the current discussion.

Regardless of what our campus masking policy is, we need to prepare for the potential disruptions that may again be caused by the pandemic, including the absences caused by student illness or the need to quarantine and isolate. Unlike last year, we have not asked instructors to prepare asynchronous online alternatives for each in-person learning experience. Instead, we will rely on existing campus policy, which requires instructors to provide "a reasonable amount of help in making up the work" that students miss due to excused absences. What constitutes "reasonable" in this context, however, is not explicitly defined and may vary with respect to course, learning objective, assignment, and type of assessment employed.

As a first draft of expectations, consider the following guidelines:

- There will be no changes to campus attendance policy other than to encourage flexibility. However, as we did last year, we ask all faculty and instructors to utilize a seating chart within Canvas for each of their courses. This will facilitate contact tracing if/when positive cases occur. As a reminder, Sean Ruppert in CITL [created a video](#) last year to explain how to set up the Roll Call and Seating Chart tools. Note that taking attendance is less important for contact tracing than simply utilizing a seating chart, especially in larger classes where daily attendance may be time-consuming.
- As happened last year, the university will assist students in informing instructors if they need to be absent due to COVID.

- Instructors should attempt to provide alternative options for students to acquire content, engage in class participation, and be meaningfully assessed for learning. These alternative options are not expected to be identical to the missed experience(s), but should strive to be as meaningful as possible in terms of enabling the achievement of learning outcomes.
- Instructors are encouraged to seek advice of departmental colleagues and the chair in formulating alternatives for students. Instructors of multiple-section courses with more than one instructor are strongly encouraged to discuss alternatives with fellow instructors to achieve equitable alternatives across sections.
- Instructors should provide students sufficient additional time to complete alternative assignments and understand that students who are ill or forced to quarantine may not be able to complete assignments within the period of convalescence.
- Wherever possible, accommodations and alternative options should be equitably assigned to all students in a course who have absences due to COVID.
- Wherever possible, course alternatives due to illness should not substantially change the grade schema for students. If changes are needed, they should not be imposed at the expense of a student's potential to achieve points. That is, wherever possible, due to illness, students should not be deprived of opportunities to acquire points available to other students.

I realize these issues are complicated, and that the guidelines above will likely need revising. I also know there are questions related to many other issues this fall. Next week, I'll be meeting to discuss the fall semester with directors, chairs, and deans in Academic Affairs, so if you have suggestions or other concerns, please share them either with me or your supervisor. Finally, as noted above, Chancellor Gibson will also be evaluating campus policies in the coming weeks as we finalize our preparations for the fall semester.

Thanks very much. I hope you all enjoy the rest of your week and the remaining days of summer.

Best,
Greg

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