

February 15, 2021

Dear Faculty and Staff Colleagues,

I am writing to provide you with an update on the calendar, and plans for the fall semester. As you may already know, I charged a committee of faculty, staff, students and academic administrators to evaluate options for the upcoming fall semester and to make recommendations for the calendar and the distribution of modalities. The committee, whose full report can be found [here](#), made two primary recommendations: to plan for a normal fall calendar, and to shift course modalities back towards face-to-face instruction with a particular emphasis on in-person classes for first and second year students. I have accepted the committee's recommendations and planning is now underway. The committee did an outstanding job in laying out alternatives along with the context, rationale, and pros and cons associated with each option.

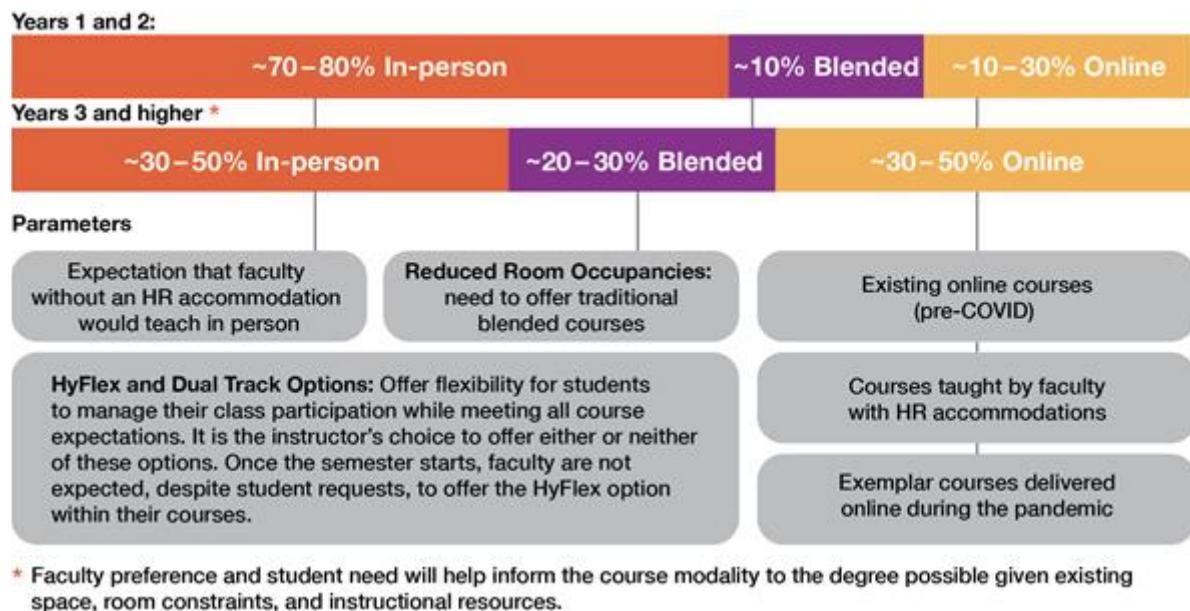
Our overall approach to fall is to build a calendar and schedule that increases in-person courses while maintaining physical distancing requirements in all classes. The approach assumes that approved faculty accommodations remain in place, and vaccine priority for faculty teaching in-person courses continues. At the same time, this plan preserves flexibility to respond in the event conditions improve and the state removes room limitations and physical distancing requirements prior to the start of the fall semester.

The body of this memo provides you with details as to how we are approaching scheduling for fall.

- The 'normal' start calendar will be followed. Classes will begin on August 23rd. We will reserve judgment on whether or not we break at Thanksgiving and have students finish their last week of classes and finals remotely. We have time to make this decision, and it will be informed by health/safety conditions.
- An important goal is to provide as many in-person courses as we can to our undergraduates and graduate students, and to place special emphasis on first and second year students. We want to ensure that these students do not have to navigate an unreasonable number of modalities, and that a majority of their

courses are in person. By contrast, last fall only 20% of first year courses were offered in the traditional in-person mode.

- The course modality distribution (see diagram below) allows us to transition back to a more traditional fall schedule. This scenario provides flexibility if conditions improve and classroom occupancy requirements are relaxed. Student survey feedback indicates that they strongly prefer in-person classes, and we know that many universities have already stated that they will be making the same type of transition in the fall. If conditions improve and we are able to increase classroom occupancy, we will begin to move A/B split modality courses back to in-person.



- We will be working with department chairs/heads on the scheduling process. In order to achieve the modality goals, departments will need to be flexible and understand that the modality targets apply both to a department's overall offerings and the distribution of multi-section courses offered.
- In fall and spring, department chairs balanced faculty course modality preferences with other factors affecting a particular course (room constraints, HR approved faculty accommodations, resources, etc.). This process will continue. Chairs will consult with their faculty prior to finalizing the schedule. It

is important that the need for increased numbers of in-person courses be understood as a key driver in the scheduling equation. As we have seen over this year, preferences may not always be able to be realized, and I ask for your support and appreciation of this dynamic.

- Modest funds for adjuncts and TA's will be available to colleges in order to help meet scheduling goals.
- We will regularly review the facts and circumstances surrounding COVID-19 to determine if the situation is improving or deteriorating. If changes need to be made to the schedule, we will make them. Clear messaging to students on the possibility of modality changes will accompany April registrations. We also recognize that late breaking changes in modality can be very disruptive for faculty. For this reason, we will make every effort to minimize changes over the summer.

I hope you are as enthusiastic about the prospect of returning to a 'new' normal as I am. It has been a challenging year for us all. While COVID has changed many of our fundamental processes, the one thing it has not changed is the passion we bring to our work every day, and the joy that comes from interacting with our students.

Questions about fall planning can be sent to Christine Licata at cmlnbt@rit.edu. You are also welcome to bring questions to the weekly Provost's Office (Half) Hour.

Sincerely,

Ellen Granberg, Ph.D.
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs