

September 13, 2021

Course Schedule Planning for Spring

Dear Colleagues:

As we begin to plan courses for spring semester and the next academic year, it is important that we build on the experience gained over the past year. As you know, the classroom occupancy restrictions caused by the pandemic required us to offer many courses in blended and online modalities. Feedback from students and faculty alike suggested strong preferences for in-person instruction with a smaller but also notable desire that some fully online, synchronous sections also be available.

RIT prides itself on being a student-centered research university where student engagement with faculty is a strength and a hallmark. We are also an institution committed to innovation and continuous improvement both inside the classroom and out. Last year showed us online instruction can be conducted in a high quality manner with excellent student outcomes. In some courses, faculty have found online instruction improves student engagement and makes possible innovative forms of instruction not available in traditional classrooms. Further, student wait lists from this semester suggest there is a demand for online sections in addition to those offered face to face. All these factors confirm what I have heard from many of you – as we return to pre-pandemic forms of instruction, there can be value in offering a larger number of online courses than we historically did prior to the pandemic.

This semester, about 21% of our undergraduate sections are online. This is less than the 2020-2021 academic year but far higher than the 5% of undergraduate sections we averaged pre-pandemic. After consulting with the deans, I am giving all colleges the latitude to schedule up to 10% of their undergraduate sections online. Raising this ceiling beyond historic levels will provide flexibility to respond to evolutions in faculty and student assessments of the pedagogical advantages of online instruction. Over time, and as we assess the long term impact of both online and in-person instruction, this cap may go up. Of course, colleges are not required to put 10% of sections online – this is up to the individual college administration and its faculty.

If you incorporate online sections into the spring 2022 academic schedule, please adhere to the following guidelines:

- For any given course, students should be able to choose between in-person and online sections. Only in exceptional circumstances and with dean approval should an online section be the sole option.
- The majority of undergraduate online courses should use synchronous delivery. Use of asynchronous delivery modes should be justified, such as support for co-op students who need flexibility in course meetings times.
- As a reminder, COVID accommodations no longer exist. As is customary practice, faculty can request an ADA accommodation through HR.
- Because of the 10% upper limit for online sections, it is expected that some faculty will be teaching more in-person classes than was the case in the fall.
- Faculty need to be consulted about the courses most appropriate for online instruction. Decisions about which courses to offer online should be guided primarily by department head and faculty judgment of pedagogical factors including:
 - Online delivery is clearly an advantageous pedagogical approach.
 - Past evidence suggests online delivery contributed to higher student success and student satisfaction.
 - Faculty are prepared to teach online and will ideally have participated in development programs for best practices in online teaching and learning.
- Emphasis should continue to be given to ensuring that first- and second-year students have a fully in-person schedule.
- Section sizes for online sections should generally follow best practices of no more than 35. In circumstances where larger sections are scheduled, the total number of sections should be reduced such that no more than 10% of students are learning online.
- Departments scheduling online courses should assess, to the degree possible, learning outcomes and student success between online and face to face versions of the same course. This will be important in determining whether we wish to further expand the number of online courses moving forward.

The Registrar's Office will provide me and the deans with updates as schedules are developed. We will also solicit feedback this year from students and faculty on the appropriate balance for us within the online space.

Looking forward to the 2022- 2023 academic year, please assume this same standard. Depending on student and faculty feedback, it is possible the ceiling will be higher than 10%, but I don't expect it to be lower. Summer term is not subject to these limits. Departments are encouraged to offer larger numbers of online courses in the summer and no cap will apply.

The pandemic has taught us many lessons and, as in any difficult time, a few good things also resulted. One of those is the renewed and reinvigorated conversations on our campus about pedagogy, student learning, and innovation. Today we have capabilities for online instruction that we never thought about two years ago. I hope we will continue to build on this expertise as we continually strengthen and develop the curriculum and pedagogy at RIT.

If you have questions or need additional guidance, please talk with your dean or associate dean or reach out to Vice Provost Christine Licata.

Best wishes,

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