Covid-19 Continency Planning Information
March 15th, 2020

Message for Chairs, Directors, Faculty, and Instructors:

The university community takes the health and wellness of our members seriously and we are interested in slowing the potential for spread of Covid-19. During this time, we are committed to ensuring the successful completion of the current academic term by all of our students.

As a reminder, McMaster in-person classes and tests for undergraduate and graduate students ended on Friday March 13th, after evening classes and tests, and there will be no in-person exams held at the end of this term.

This may mean offering alternate forms of evaluations and modifying your course delivery. Below is updated information on some aspects of student learning experiences. We hope that you will appreciate that more updates will follow over the next few days and we appreciate your patience.

Undergraduate placement, thesis, co-op and internship experiences

- Undergraduate in-person placements are cancelled immediately. Any outstanding hours will be completed remotely and a plan should be developed between the student, the placement or field supervisor (if possible) and the placement course lead or instructor in your Department. Students are asked to look for communication from the placement course lead or instructor or to reach out to them for information.

- Undergraduate thesis students are asked to communicate with their thesis advisors about what work needs to be completed in person, using appropriate hygiene (hand washing and respiratory hygiene) and distancing protocols (two meters of workspace per person), and what work can be done remotely, including final written or presentation work.

- Undergraduate co-ops and internships may continue if the place of work is still operating. Students are asked to communicate with their place of employment and their Faculty Co-Op Office. Students are urged to continue using appropriate hygiene (hand washing and respiratory hygiene) and distancing protocols (two meters of workspace per person.)

Accessibility, Equity and Inclusion

We appreciate that this is an uncertain time for instructors and students, but please do not lose your attention to equity and inclusion in your course. Please try to maintain an online environment that includes and values all students.

Things to keep in mind:

- Communication and support are important. Be transparent about the reasons for your course changes and communicate them clearly. Ask students what they need.
• Be aware of unequal access to technology, hardware, and software. Sometime a simple solution may be better.
• Ensure materials are accessible and mobile-friendly. When providing documents to read, provide them in multiple formats including PDF and Word documents.
• As appropriate, provide a balance of asynchronous and synchronous tools and course materials. Keeping the current lecture time for online lectures maintains a valuable routine for students, but not all students will be able to access the lecture at that time. Consider recording and making the lecture available to all students.
• Stress and anxiety are elevated in our students. When possible, offer all students additional flexibility to meet deadlines, adjust workloads, and the necessary time to adapt to their individual situations.
• During online testing, you will not be able to guarantee that students won’t communicate and collaborate. Think about testing that invites collaboration. If this is not possible, make your expectations clear and trust your students.

Examination Schedule
McMaster University will not be holding in-person examination in April 2020. We are keeping the exam schedule provided by the Registrar’s office. This schedule carefully spaces exams so that students are not writing two or more exams at the same time. For this reason, if you are offering an online or take-home version of your exam, please make it available at least during the scheduled exam time-period. You may choose to make the exam available longer, open it sooner, and/or close it later.

Please also remember to incorporate existing SAS accommodations. For information on providing individual accommodations on Avenue to Learn quizzes, please see information available at the MacPherson Instructional Continuity website.

Modifications to course evaluation plans
As instructors reimagine the course evaluation structure in their courses, we want to balance the desire to communicate promptly with anxious students, on the one hand, and consultation with Departmental Chair and Directors, on the other. The latter is vital to ensure that departments and Faculties continue to provide students with the materials and preparation needed to meet programme and degree requirements, especially those involving professional accreditation. Thus, consultation is required as part of our UG Course Management Policy: "Any changes related to evaluation must be made in consultation with the Department Chair" (Section A 7). We ask that Instructors share and communicate changes with their departmental lead, who has an eye to how course changes interact within a program and can monitor whether, cumulatively, the changes are fair and equitable to students.

That said, we do not want this consultation process to slow down communication with students, so we ask that Chairs/Directors be flexible in understanding that release to students may take priority over waiting for review. We also ask that instructors align with the best practices, processes, and timelines determined within their departments and Faculties in order to allow for planning of additional resources, including IT support or TA needs that may be required. Finally, we ask that all instructors communicate promptly and provide students with the modified course evaluation structure before 5pm on Wednesday March 18th, 2020.

Pending updates will include information on MSAF policies, SAS accommodations, course withdrawal policies, deferred exams, and spring/summer classes.

Thank you for your attention to these updates.
Sincerely,
Kim Dej, Acting Vice-Provost, Faculty