

Planning for Fall Instruction

Email Sent to Faculty on June 25, 2020

Dear Faculty,

As we prepare for fall instruction, I wanted to share some of the direction from the Dean's Council and an instruction working group that includes faculty members, IT, and student affairs. Our students have made it abundantly clear that they want to be back on campus interacting with our faculty.

Conversations that I have had with many of you indicate that you are eager to have students back on campus and in your classrooms and labs as well. I share this eagerness to have our students back in Butte. This eagerness is tempered by the understanding that this fall is not going to be like any other. We will all need to be adaptable and patient as we navigate the uncharted seas ahead, ensuring we deliver both the learning and living experience that we are known for and the safety and security of all members of this community.

This email is long but it covers the areas of COVID-19 planning, Instructional Best Practices/Considerations, the academic support Montana Tech is providing to faculty, initial guidelines for offering an online course in Fall, and directions for faculty who have circumstances that may prevent teaching in-person this fall. This message and supporting materials that are developed in-house will be hyperlinked and available on the Provost web page (<https://www.mtech.edu/academics/provost/>).

COVID-19 Planning

- As per the directive from OCHE to all of the MUS campuses, we are planning for students to be on campus and for face-to-face (FTF) instruction to be the predominant instructional delivery mode. In addition to the directive, our students have also indicated that they would overwhelmingly prefer FTF instruction this fall.
- We need to be prepared for a number of different scenarios in the fall. The most extreme situation is that we would need to shift to delivering instruction fully online prior to the end of the semester.
- We need to structure our classes and classroom spaces to comply with directives from the local health department and state to minimize the transmission of COVID-19. Our current operating assumption is that Montana will be at Phase Two ([Phase Two Link](#) and [MT COVID site Link](#)).
- The Chancellor is working with COVID-19 Planning Group and the health department to prepare the campus for a fall with students on campus. We can expect that he will be sharing recommendations from this group very soon. These recommendations will address the health and safety issues associated with all aspects of having students, faculty, and staff on campus, including classroom protocols for FTF instruction.

Instructional Best Practices and Considerations

As we plan for fall classes, we need to consider the following ideas so we are best prepared to deliver high quality instruction, can support students and faculty, and can quickly adjust to new directives.

- If possible, offer one section of a multi-section course online. This will provide options for students and faculty. It also positions us well if there is a required shift to all-online during the semester.
- Create some classes that are a blend of online and in-person delivery. For example, a portion of the class would attend the FTF class while some would participate online; in a hyflex model the class is split into two or more groups, with the groups taking turns coming to the classroom and participating online. Alternatively, the class could be a hybrid where all students attend the in-person class for 50% (more or less) of the time and spend the rest of the time online only. Hyflex uses all of the classroom time split between two groups while hybrid uses the classroom only half of the time and is online half of the time as a single group.
- We strongly encourage all faculty to use Moodle, our online course management system, for their classes. This will allow students who cannot be present in the classroom to participate, learn the class content, and meet the learning outcomes of the class. Again, this will have us better prepared for a shift to all-online instruction if that becomes necessary, or to accommodate students when they are ill and should not attend in person.
- Use frequent, low-stakes assessment of student work. This positions us well if there is a need to assess course learning outcomes in the event the semester ends early. (Research has shown that frequent assessment, particularly in an online environment, reduces academic dishonesty and leads to better student outcomes.)
- Ensure academic integrity for online assessments.

Academic support Montana Tech is providing to faculty

To help faculty, Montana Tech has already started the following:

- To purchase equipment for most instructional classrooms that will allow real-time streaming and capturing of in-person classes. These systems will allow for interaction of students, who are attending the class remotely. Training and quick reference guides will be provided for using this equipment.
- Contracted with [Proctorio](#), an online remote proctoring service that will provide us with the ability to perform assessments online in a secure manner. This system can be integrated into Moodle.
- Provide resources and workshops to assist faculty in creating courses and developing course materials that align with the Quality Learning and Teaching framework (QLT). (More details to come as Lloyd Curtis finalizes the topics and schedule).

Initial guidelines for offering an online course in Fall

We strongly encourage all faculty to consider the possibility that instruction this fall may require a partial or full shift from FTF to online. At a minimum, to be prepared for such a shift, this would include using Moodle to manage communications, post grades, and prepare an “online ready” syllabus. Where appropriate, faculty could consider offering classes in a hyFlex or hybrid format (hyFlex References: [Educause](#), [InsideHigherEd](#) and [InsideHigherEd](#)).

- Those faculty who are considering teaching online in the fall, either partially or fully, will need to participate in some workshops and short self-study courses. We plan on offering these workshops both in-person and online. We will start scheduling these workshops in July.
- Faculty who wish to teach a class or classes either partially or fully online this fall will need to complete an [Online/Hybrid/HyFlex Course Request Form](#) followed by a consultation with their Department Head for approval. The Department Head will then consult with the Dean for final approval. Exception to this approval process will be for those faculty who must teach online (please see the following section).

At-Risk Considerations

We know that there are faculty who are concerned they may not/should not be teaching FTF in the fall. Those individuals need to reach out to Vanessa Van Dyk in Human Resources. Vanessa will work with individuals to determine appropriate accommodations.

As the summer progresses, you can expect more communications from the chancellor and my office. I will be working closely with Faculty Senate leadership to ensure that your questions and concerns are brought forward for consideration. Additionally, you are encouraged to reach out to your department head, dean, or me with your questions or suggestions.

Thanks for all that you do for our students at Montana Tech. You provide the exceptional learning and mentoring that prepares our students for success and leadership in meaningful and fulfilling careers.