

To: Pitt Johnstown Faculty
From: Janet Grady, VPAA
Date: June 30, 2020
Subject: Update on Fall Planning

As I write this memo, I hope you are finding time to enjoy the beautiful outdoors in our region this time of year. At the same time, I am certain you are thinking about the upcoming fall semester, your courses, and your students. The purpose of this memo is to update you on areas covered in my recent memo dated June 10, as well as other important information.

Working Groups at Pitt Johnstown

As you are aware, Dr. Spectar appointed several Working Groups comprised of faculty and staff, and these groups have been meeting regularly via Zoom to plan for the fall semester. The Academic Life Working Group has been focused on how we can continue to provide the highest quality academic experience for our students, despite challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The safety of the entire campus community is a primary concern, and we are working with the Facilities Working Group and others to ensure a safe learning environment for all. Additional information on masks, hand sanitizers, surface cleaning, etc., will be forthcoming.

What Classes Will Look Like

At Pitt Johnstown, our signature method of course delivery has always been the live, in-person interaction between faculty and students that is consistent with our mission. We believe this remains the preference of our faculty and students. However, we have had to re-envision our instructional delivery options to accommodate changes brought about by the pandemic. The University has adopted an instructional delivery approach called *Flex@Pitt*, which leverages remote technologies as appropriate, and enables us to offer courses in a safe and de-densified manner. In a recent communication sent by Provost Ann Cudd, it was explained that “Under the *Flex@Pitt* model, neither faculty members nor students will be required to be in the classroom in person for the majority of programs.” Dr. Cudd further explained that but for a few exceptions, “a classroom experience must be made available for students—and faculty are encouraged to physically come to the classroom where possible. Where that is not possible, the faculty member is still responsible for designing and monitoring the classroom experience.”

While our primary method of course delivery at Pitt Johnstown remains in-person classroom instruction, courses may include in-person, remote, synchronous, and asynchronous components. Students will be able to take on-campus courses, while some students who wish to study remotely because of circumstances created by the pandemic will also be able to do so. In order to enable remote learning, the University has been working to identify an appropriate technology solution. Although details of the standard technology that will be installed in classrooms are still being finalized, we know that this technology will enable faculty to provide a similar learning experience to students regardless of location. Using the technology installed in the classrooms, faculty will interact with remote students as well as with onsite students, and slides and other course materials can be projected and viewed by all students. In the situation of an instructor being offsite, a classroom will still be assigned for the students, who will be able to interact not only with their instructor, but also to connect with their in-person as well as their remote classmates. Although the instructor has primary responsibility and oversight of the class, we are striving to have a facilitator in each classroom where an instructor is remote, not only to manage equipment and assure safety, but also to help guide classroom discussions, respond to student questions, and assist with other in-person classroom management tasks. A facilitator may be a graduate student, teaching assistant, other faculty members, or a staff member.

Returning to Campus

Each department head across campus has been asked to prepare a “return to work” plan, which is based on guidelines provided by the University and other experts. Once the plan for your department is developed and approved, you will be notified that you may return to your department and office. We anticipate that individuals will begin returning to campus in early to mid-July, as necessary. You have received instructions from Amy Buxbaum explaining the steps, including the self-attestation statement, required before you may return to campus.

If you are a faculty member interested in returning to a campus lab for research purposes, a “research restart plan” will need to be submitted, and your Division Chair can assist you in locating the plan template and checklist. Several faculty members have already submitted research plans, and these are currently in the approval queue.

Faculty Development Opportunities

Academic Affairs has scheduled both real-time Zoom sessions and recorded sessions to familiarize faculty with Canvas, the Learning Management System. Several faculty members who are especially well-versed in the use of Canvas have agreed to serve as faculty mentors, and we are planning multiple sessions during July and August. The use of Canvas is encouraged, because the software facilitates many aspects of both in-person and remote learning, as users of the former BlackBoard system can attest. In addition to Canvas training, Academic Affairs will schedule training sessions on the use of Pathways, the University’s new advising platform, in July and August. Although faculty will hold in-person office hours and advising sessions for students, faculty are encouraged to use the Pathways System to enhance the quality of student advising, particularly during this time when students may have additional questions and may require additional advising support. Beyond resources available on our own campus, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) on the Oakland campus offers a wide range of faculty

development opportunities that are easily accessible online to all individuals teaching courses. Many helpful resources are available on the CTL website. When plans for classroom technology are finalized, Pitt Johnstown IT Department will schedule both real-time and recorded sessions, and will provide instructional materials, on the use of the new classroom equipment.

Scheduling Revisions

In-person classes will begin at Pitt Johnstown on Wednesday, August 19, and classes will be held on Labor Day, September 7. The schedule includes a “self-care” day on Wednesday, October 14, when no classes will be held. Monday, November 23, and Tuesday, November 24 will be reserved for in-person final exams, and in-person classes will end on Friday, November 20. While students will not return to campus following Thanksgiving Break, the week of November 30 through December 4 will be used for online final exams. The semester will end on Saturday, December 5.

To support our primary goal of in-person instruction in a safe environment, our Division Chairs and Schedulers have been working to make some adjustments to the fall schedule. While being cognizant of the need to maintain as much stability as possible in the existing course schedule, some classes will be moved in accordance with defined class size limits based on classroom square footage. This means that one or more of your classes may be moved to a space that will accommodate the enrollment. Because we have a limited number of larger classrooms needed to maintain recommended social distancing, we are planning to use non-traditional classroom spaces, including the Murtha Center, PPAC, Cambria Room, Heritage Hall, and Whalley Chapel. Our IT Department is working to install appropriate instructional technology in those newly-identified classroom spaces. Even though we are working to find and prepare spaces that will accommodate all students registered for your courses, it may be necessary in some cases to implement a “rotating cohort model,” in which students are divided into groups, with each group attending a portion of course sessions, perhaps on alternating days or as determined by the instructor. We are trying to minimize the use of a “rotating cohort model” by expanding the number of spaces on campus that can be used for classes, but it may be an acceptable approach for certain exceptional cases. As an example, students enrolled in lab courses may be divided into two groups, with each attending for half of the allotted course time. Pre-work can be completed remotely, so that in-person time can be used for actual hands-on experiments and other lab assignments.

Rest of Summer

Thank you again for your patience as we refine plans for the fall semester. We have had two successful Academic Planning Days, with another scheduled for July 16, and we are excited to welcome our incoming freshmen. They have had some questions about our “temporary new normal,” but they seem eager to begin their Pitt Johnstown experience. I know you are all committed to providing them with the same top-notch academic experience students have come to expect, and for which our campus is well-known.

Please contact your Division chair or me if you have additional questions. We may not yet have precise answers to everything, but we are making excellent progress, and are confident that we will all be ready when the semester begins. In the meantime, look for additional information in your email about trainings for Canvas, Pathways, and the new classroom technology. And, very importantly, embrace and enjoy your summer world!