

August 24, 2021

Dear President Robbins, Provost Folks, Vice Provost Romero, Dr. Carmona and Pandemic Academic Coordination Group;

As the University of Arizona enters the Fall 2021 semester, it is clear that the pathway for changing class modalities is not flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances in classrooms and to mitigate risk to faculty and students. Shared governance bodies and campus groups have been notified that instructor requests for changes in teaching modality are currently stalled in an unclear and slow process involving the Disability Resource Center (DRC), Human Resources (HR), supervisors, and the Provost's office. Alarming, reports are also emerging that concerned faculty have been told to not even bother requesting course modality changes.

In his presentation on August 23rd, President Robbins said that the filling of the isolation dorms and local ICU beds would trigger considerations of campus-wide remote online teaching. However, it is clear that we need more nimble and responsive policies now. Many who were prepared for pre-Delta disease levels and are now returning to face-to-face teaching find themselves exposed to heightened risk. Our community cannot wait for the beds to be filled to adjust our teaching modalities, nor can our instructors wait for a process that requires the DRC, HR, and a stalled Provost decision. The uncertainty and inflexibility of the current system alone poses significant risk to students, staff, and faculty's mental health.

Thus, as concerned faculty, we urge University administrators to implement a clear and transparent pathway for instructors (including graduate teaching assistants) to flexibly shift to online teaching modality. We believe this modality pathway is critically necessary when circumstances require a class, but not necessarily the whole university, to move to remote learning. This localized response will enhance the safety and well-being of instructors and students, reduce stress and anxiety of the uncertain times, and improve the learning experience for all. Importantly, it will help prevent the depletion of our limited health care resources by forestalling the bed shortage, which should not be viewed as a leading indicator, but as a community emergency to be avoided.

Below, we provide a proposed process (based on other universities' policies) that allows instructors to be responsive to their own and students' needs. This process empowers instructors to make assessments in their classrooms without fear for job security. We urge the Provost and University administrators to have the confidence in instructors to make the right decision during this time and to implement this process immediately to ensure the well-being of our students, staff, and faculty.

Process for Flexible and Timely Modality Shifts

Instructors should request an exemption from in-person teaching by completing a brief online form. They must indicate the general reason for the request (without being required to reveal HIPAA protected information) and must notify their supervisors prior to submitting the form (and prior to moving their classes to remote delivery). Instructors should receive acknowledgement of their request within 48 hours from the Provost's office, and this request should be automatically approved based on whether the instructor has one or more of the following medical and non-medical issues:

- Has a medical issue, such as, but not limited to, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, and/or is at a significantly higher risk of becoming significantly ill from COVID19;
- May not be able to get vaccinated for medical reasons;
- Has a household member in the above high-risk group;
- Has a household member who cannot be vaccinated;
- Is ill with COVID19 or quarantined based on household illness or exposure;
- Has learned about disease outbreaks in their class.

Sincerely,

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