

From the Provost - Fall Course Instruction | COVID at Rice

Dear Rice Colleagues and Students,

We are writing today to provide more clarity about what instruction will look like this fall for both students and instructors. As you know, the university recently updated its [COVID-19 policies](#) in light of the [delta variant](#), the now dominant and more contagious coronavirus strain in the United States.

As previously stated, our intention is to have in-person instruction for the fall semester, balancing the safety of the members of our community while delivering on our educational mission. Detailed below are guidelines to help maintain a safe, yet enriching classroom environment for all.

If you have additional questions, please reach out to your department chair, dean or one of us. We want to make sure all of your questions are answered and that you have what you need to pave a productive path forward before the semester begins later this month.

Masks

As noted in the message from Crisis Management, students — vaccinated and unvaccinated — must wear a mask in the classroom. While lecturing, vaccinated instructors can forgo wearing a mask if they maintain a distance of at least 10 feet between themselves and their students. Vaccinated individuals who are not formal course instructors but take an instructor-like role (such as a teaching assistant while lecturing, a student defending a thesis or a guest speaker) may similarly choose to forgo wearing a mask if vaccinated and maintaining an appropriate distance. Unvaccinated instructors must wear a mask at all times. Microphones will be available to those who wear a mask while lecturing.

Vaccinations

Based on prior survey information, we expect that more than 90% of our total community of 12,000 students, faculty and staff will be fully vaccinated during the fall semester. Current survey data on the undergraduate student populations shows an even higher vaccination rate. More than 94% of those who have responded indicate they are vaccinated or will vaccinate upon arrival to campus.

If you haven't already done so, we urge every member of our community to get vaccinated. It's the single best thing all of us can do for our own health and the health of our community. More vaccine clinics, on or close to campus, will be available soon. In addition to getting the vaccine, we ask that you inform us of your vaccination status. All undergraduate and graduate students who will be enrolled at Rice for the fall 2021 semester must [fill out this form](#). All faculty and staff must review and update their current vaccine status by completing [this short form](#) no later than Aug. 15. Please note, instructors may not ask students about their vaccination status and vice versa. This prohibition includes students who are engaged in either coursework or research. This information is protected by law.

Exposure, Contact Tracing and Illness Protocol

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises that any fully vaccinated person who experiences symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should isolate themselves from others, be clinically evaluated for COVID-19 and be tested for SARS-CoV-2 if indicated. Please note that CDC guidance on when to [quarantine has changed](#), and vaccinated people currently need not quarantine unless they develop symptoms, however, they should get tested within three to five days after their exposure.

With these considerations in mind, anyone who feels ill should avoid contact with other people and stay home if they live off-campus. Rice will again employ contact tracing this year to reduce the risk to our community. If a person is determined to have been exposed to a positive case by the contact tracing team, they will be contacted as soon as possible. Health report forms in English and Spanish are available on the main [COVID at Rice website](#). Rice students, staff and faculty must complete these forms if they are concerned they've been exposed to COVID-19. If a member of Rice's faculty, staff or student body tests positive for COVID-19, they must complete the health report form and await guidance from the Rice contact tracing team. The team answers most reports within an hour of submission. The contact tracing hours for the semester are 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the weekends. Any critical classroom-related COVID-19 exposure that happens outside those hours should be reported to Jerusha Kasch at (713) 725-9256. Until you've been contacted by a member of the contract tracing team, please wear a mask and avoid direct contact with others, including going to class.

Preparing for Alternate Teaching Methods

A very small number of students will not be able to get to campus before the start of the semester due to travel or visa restrictions. In addition, some students and instructors may need to quarantine or isolate

for as many as 14 days due to exposure to COVID-19 during the semester. As a result, instructors should make preparations to accommodate these potential circumstances.

- **Courses with students who will not be able to arrive in Houston:** Remote students should have access to the educational content of the class on which their grade is based, unless an exemption has been obtained from the provost due to the particular nature of the course (such as a lab course). Dual delivery, while not required, is encouraged for these courses and may be the best way to accommodate remote students. However, simply recording the course lectures and making them available to remote students is sufficient, along with accommodating these students' ability to complete assignments given the possibility that they will be in different time zones. By Aug. 13, instructors of undergraduate courses who are affected by this will be notified. Graduate students should be discussing any late arrivals or deferrals directly with their degree programs and any issues and accommodations should be resolved by the department chair and director of graduate studies.
- **Courses with students who must miss extended time due to illness:** Dual delivery may also be used to accommodate students who must miss class due to illness, and recording classes and making them available to sick, quarantining or isolating students is sufficient.
- **When instructors must quarantine or isolate:** Instructors should plan for how they will accommodate their course should they need to quarantine or isolate for more than one or two class meetings. If able, such instructors can teach via Zoom or they can have a colleague or qualified postdoctoral student or graduate student cover their course.
- **Large Classes:** Instructors of classes with enrollments of 100 or greater can choose to start the semester in online mode. The course should plan to resume face-to-face instruction by Sept. 13.

As stated in the message from Crisis Management, people who do not feel well should stay home. For this reason, it is important that all instructors are as accommodating as possible in their management of absences related to illness this fall. Our collective goal should be to keep people who are not feeling well out of the classroom but still engaged with their academic pursuits. Tech teaching assistants will be available to instructors who would like them. Please contact teaching@rice.edu to request such accommodations.

It is important to note that courses using some modified or blended mode of instruction must maintain a significant face-to-face component, such that the course remains classified as a face-to-face course instead of a distance and online education course as defined and governed by [Rice policy 846](#). Rice defines a face-to-face course as one with at least half the instructional contact hours occurring with the student and instructor in the same physical space. These hours are exclusive of office hours.

Instructors who choose to use dual delivery or adopt new blended learning methods such as a flipped classroom for fall should notify their chair or dean in schools that don't have departments to ensure that the method works pedagogically. Instructors should also inform the Office of the Registrar to officially change the mode of instruction and make sure appropriate classroom technology is in place, and they should update their syllabi to accurately describe how instructional material will be delivered in their courses. Instructors will not be required to accommodate students who choose not to participate in the planned mode. For questions about available classroom technology, TechTA program or other technology-based capabilities instructors should contact teaching@rice.edu. Instructors who need additional help with dual delivery should contact RiceOnline@rice.edu or the [Center for Teaching Excellence](#).

Instructors who desire an exemption from face-to-face teaching must petition the vice provost of academic affairs, who will work with the [Disability Resource Center](#) and Human Resources to process the requests based on the following overarching categories:

- Significant medical issue as [defined](#) under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and may allow for a [reasonable accommodation](#)
- All other nonmedical issues

Exemptions within these categories are expected to be based on one or more of the following medical and nonmedical issues, namely that the faculty member:

- Has medical issues, like heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, and/or is at a significantly higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19;
- Has a household member in the above high-risk group;
- Has a household member who cannot be vaccinated.

Instructors should notify their chair or dean in schools that don't have departments before starting the petition process. All instructors who receive an exemption from face-to-face teaching must contact RiceOnline@rice.edu and complete training for successful online course instruction.

We know some of you are concerned about the changing climate surrounding COVID-19. To help address some of those concerns, we are organizing a forum with Texas Medical Center infectious disease professionals to answer questions that many of you may have about what's in store over the coming months. Stay tuned for details about when that forum will be held.

As always, we appreciate your continued effort to adapt to the realities of teaching during the pandemic. There will be challenges this semester, but with good planning and continued agility, we will overcome them and continue to meet the educational needs of our students while keeping everyone safe and healthy. We will continue to monitor the situation in Houston and on campus, and will make any necessary adjustments.

Warmest regards,

Reginald DesRoches, Howard Hughes Provost

Christopher Johns-Krull, Faculty Senate Speaker

Bridget Gorman, Dean of Undergraduates

Seiichi Matsuda, Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies