

## **Planning for Fall 2021 Faculty and Academic Staff Engagement**

Provost Cyril Clarke communicated the following in his Weekly Communications Update (February 26): “Although there are still many unknowns, I am optimistic that the increasing availability of vaccines and continued adherence to health and safety protocols will result in a fall 2021 semester that looks similar to that of pre-pandemic semesters. Assuming current limitations continue through the end of spring and that we will be able to resume in-person instruction in the fall, summer sessions will serve as a transition period.” The majority of courses should return to the modality that was used in Fall 2019.

Virginia Tech will follow all public health and safety protocols in place for summer and for fall 2021. In accordance with the health and safety protocols anticipated to be in place at the start of the fall 2021 semester, faculty should prepare to return to their primary campus on a regular basis beginning in August 2021.

Faculty are expected to be on-campus during the academic year with most courses offered in-person or hybrid. At this time, a return to 2019 instructional space capacities is included among our planning assumptions. In the event that physical distancing is still necessary, the registrar will work with instructors and academic unit leaders on a case-by-case basis to optimize in-person learning and maximize use of instructional space.

- Faculty will not be required to offer an online option for a course that is scheduled to be taught in person based on a student request. Faculty should work with students who may be unable to attend class for a period of time due to illness or other personal circumstances. The Dean of Students is available to assist students in such circumstances.
- Courses prepared for online instruction and offered online during the regular semesters prior to March 2020 will presumably remain online.
- Given the creative and cutting-edge pedagogical innovations implemented by faculty this past year, other courses may also be taught virtually if the plan is to continue to offer the courses online and there is a strong justification based on pedagogy and student access. For large course sections, remote delivery of courses designed for in-person or hybrid delivery may be appropriate according to health and safety guidelines at that point in time. Any decision to shift in-person or hybrid courses to fully online should be made in consultation with the academic department head and/or dean.
- Online courses must ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, course learning outcomes and student experience are equivalent to in-person modalities. Thus, online instruction must be high quality and must provide students with equivalent opportunities to engage with one another and with the instructor, and online students must be afforded the same level of support provided to students enrolled in in-person or hybrid courses.
- Departments are responsible for meeting the standards articulated in Policy 6364 Distance Learning. TLOS provides training and support for faculty to meet the expectations and standards for quality for online teaching described at: <https://led.tlos.vt.edu/support/certificatesandqual.html>

Faculty members who wish to teach temporarily from out-of-state or internationally must submit a Change in Duty Station Request, which must be approved by the department head, dean, and provost's office. Any approval for temporary teaching from out-of-state or internationally requires the faculty member's commitment to meet all expectations for quality assurance in online teaching and be reasonably available to students enrolled in the course across the relevant time zones. Faculty are also expected to engage fully in research and scholarly work, and service assignments.

The expectation is for academic program and student support offices to reopen full-time and for services to be offered in-person. In-person services may be supplemented online. Office hours for department administration, academic programs, and support services should be held in-person, but also can be offered virtually.

Departments will be responsible for ensuring that faculty and staff are able to follow public health guidelines while working in offices and other spaces operated and managed by departments. This may require a hybrid work schedule, with faculty and staff scheduled to be on campus in numbers consistent with public health safety.

We will strive to accommodate faculty whose health and family needs require remote work. Faculty requests to teach courses remotely will need their department head's and dean's approval. Faculty members with health or other issues should make requests for working remotely through the Office of ADA and Accessibility in the Office of Equity and Accessibility.

## **Research**

Research laboratories may return to their usual processes and procedures based on [OVPRI guidelines](#). Lab/staff meetings may be a mix of in-person and virtual. If meetings are held in-person, public health guidelines in force at the time must be followed.

## **Travel**

Policies and procedures have been put in place to promote the health, safety, and security of members of the university community (employees and students) traveling outside of the United States for university-supported purposes.

Virginia Tech [Policy 1070: Global Travel Policy](#), does not authorize any university-supported international travel to locations where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a Travel Health Notice Level 3 or higher, either [due to COVID-19](#) or [non-COVID-19 related causes](#). Also, Policy 1070 does not authorize student university-supported international travel to locations where the U.S. Department of State has issued a [Travel Advisory Level 3 or higher](#).

Under extraordinary circumstances, individuals or university group leaders can petition the Global Travel Oversight Committee (GTOC) for an exception to Policy 1070. The petitioner is responsible for proving necessity of travel and sufficient risk mitigation to merit travel approval. See the [Procedure to Request an Exception to Policy – International Travel](#). Waivers are not guaranteed and can be revoked at any time by the GTOC or the university president, as the



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situation progresses. Students seeking an exception to Policy 1070 to study abroad for summer 2021 or fall 2021 should follow guidance available in [Pre-Flight Orientation](#).

Virginia Tech, per VDH guidance, also advises employees to avoid all non-essential domestic travel. Although there are currently no requirements in place for quarantining after domestic travel, employees should continue to wear a face covering, maintain physical distancing, practice good hygiene, and monitor for symptoms. Refer to the [VDH travel site](#) for the latest information.

## **Meetings**

Staff meetings may be held in person and/or virtually, as departments may have a mix of work arrangements.

Conferences, seminars, etc. may remain virtual and/or have a virtual option to enhance participation.

Thesis and dissertation defenses may be held virtually and/ or in-person.