



MEMORANDUM

To: **Gillings School faculty, staff and students**
cc: **Laura A. Linnan**, ScD, Senior Associate Dean, Academic and Student Affairs
From: Barbara K. Rimer *BLR*
Date: January 26, 2022
Subject: **Clarification regarding return to in-person instruction at Gillings**

Yesterday, we sent two separate emails about a planned return to in-person mode of instruction at Gillings – one to students and one to faculty – with copies to Dean’s Council members so that staff would also receive the messages.

The information we shared in those two messages will not change here, but we want to add some clarification in view of questions, misunderstanding and misinterpretations we have heard over the past 24 hours. We completely understand why this happens. We have sent numerous messages in recent weeks, and people may interpret the messages through their own cognitive lenses. A few key points of emphasis:

- **We are returning to in-person instruction as our default mode of instruction on Monday, January 31.** The College of Arts and Sciences, Schools of Journalism and Media, Education, Law and Business, and other UNC professional schools have returned to in-person instruction. While we still are in pandemic conditions, experience shows that, with proper masking, with high rates of vaccination and boosters, distancing when possible, and no eating/drinking in classrooms, in-person instruction can be accomplished safely. The fall semester provides evidence for that, and universities around the country have returned to classrooms. That includes many schools of public health.
- **That said, there are circumstances under which faculty and students will not be able to safely participate with in-person instruction.** We have established conditions under which faculty can use their discretion to ensure safe teaching and learning environments. Specifically, they can request approval for:
 - ✓ **Permanent MOI Change** – This MOI change appears in ConnectCarolina and will affect international student credits. Must be approved at the Department Chair and Senior Associate Dean levels. This would involve something other than in-person for the entire semester.
 - ✓ **Temporary MOI Change** – This MOI change does not appear in ConnectCarolina. It should not affect international student credits and must be approved at the Department Chair and Senior Associate Dean levels. This involves something other than in-person instruction for more than one week of instruction.

- **NOTE re Temporary Adjustments (vs. Temporary MOI Change):** Faculty always have discretion to make a **Temporary ADJUSTMENT** in MOI due to travel, conferences, illness of instructors or other short-term adjustments. This does not require any prior approval.
- **ALL Temporary and Permanent MOI changes (not adjustments) must be documented and reported to the provost this semester.**
 - **In all cases this semester, the expectation is that faculty communicate with students to make the best decisions to ensure safe teaching and learning for specific classes.** Some faculty have polled their students, others have had informal conversations. We have emphasized with both students and faculty that, under no circumstances, should anyone come to class if they have been exposed, have symptoms of illness, or have a COVID diagnosis. Please err on the side of staying safe and healthy. To further clarify, as you would under non-pandemic conditions, students should be in touch with faculty when extenuating circumstances may make it impossible for them to attend classes. Specifically, caring for an ill family member, or any number of circumstances may arise. Please communicate with your faculty instructors should you need to miss class. We have asked all faculty to make class recordings in case students must miss class. Not all classes have the capacity or the ability to allow students to zoom in to an in-person class. However, we are confident that faculty and students will make every effort to be flexible, adaptable and kind as we work toward achieving the best possible teaching and learning options. These options will likely differ by the type, goals and size of the class.
 - **A final word about “hybrid” instruction.** There has been some confusion about what this means, and whether the hybrid option is available. Technically, there is no “hybrid” MOI choice option in ConnectCarolina. As a result, prior to the start of the semester, faculty were told that the “hybrid” choice was not an “option” this term. What we meant was that hybrid was not one of the ConnectCarolina options. As many of you have experienced, we are encouraging faculty to record all classes AND WHEN POSSIBLE, to allow for Zoom in classes. As a result, many Gillings classes are occurring now with in-person instruction, while some students zoom in to class synchronously. This is an example of “hybrid teaching.” It is not referring to ConnectCarolina – it is ensuring the best teaching and learning option with the technology we have available.

We hope this clarifies that we absolutely have hybrid teaching options available this semester. We are leaving the discretion, as we have historically at Gillings, to faculty to work to ensure the best teaching and learning environments for their classes. We encourage students to communicate with faculty when it might not be possible, safe or healthy for them to attend class. We are confident that we can continue to move forward successfully with these guiding principles in mind.

At Gillings, school leaders aim to be accessible and are open to discussions when our students have questions or concerns. We find that the fastest, most efficient way to get on the same page is for people, whether staff, students or faculty members, to ask questions.

Hopefully, this memo will clarify and amplify how we are approaching this semester. There is a fair amount of discretion, flexibility and adaptability built into our processes and our approach. We know it will still be challenging for everyone, and we ask that you do your best to keep communication flowing. We all share the same goal: a successful spring semester. We are a highly vaccinated university and school. We encourage anyone eligible for boosters who has not yet gotten a booster to do so asap. Upon receiving vaccination(s)/boosters, all students, faculty and staff should attest via the University’s online [COVID-19 Vaccine Certification form](#) to assist with data-gathering efforts.

We will continue to require indoor masking and other healthy practices noted earlier. Our facilities director, Brent Wishart, will send an email shortly about the quality of masks we are providing. In this environment, most people will be safe. We recognize each person is an individual with their own health and social histories, including those of their families. We will be responsive, as we have been to date, to individual needs. We are going to have to learn to help ourselves and one another not just live through the pandemic but live with it. Thanks!

BKR/lw