

October 1, 2020

Merced College Colleagues,

As promised, I am sending a message by the predetermined deadline of October 1<sup>st</sup> regarding the instructional modality for the spring 2021 term. As always, this decision has been made in consultation with multiple leaders—both internal and external. In the spirit of keeping this as brief as possible, I will avoid unnecessary details and get straight to the plan and the pertinent information. *Please note: This email is not intended to cover all details—more information will be forthcoming.*

According to a discussion held with the Merced County Department of Public Health yesterday, we are expected to be moving from “purple” to the “red” risk level over the next several weeks ([Blueprint for a Safer Economy risk level info](#)). This is good news for our county. Moving to the “red” risk level will allow businesses to plan for responsible and safe re-openings according to state and local guidelines. For the College, it will also, potentially create less restrictive measures, while ensuring we continue to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through responsible decision making.

Given this information, the plan for the spring 2021 schedule will include less restrictive protocols for face-to-face classes. We will continue with our current format of offering face-to-face laboratory and online classes. The Office of Instruction will also work with faculty to offer, within the guidelines provided by both state and local officials, face-to-face lecture options for our students. In an effort to avoid the impact from the flu season and any community spread associated with the holiday season, these face-to-face classes will start approximately six weeks after the beginning of the spring semester. Unless conditions and recommendations change, this will be our plan for the spring 2021 term. *Please note: No one will be required to teach face-to-face—it will be strictly voluntary (more information to come).*

The health and safety of our employees, students, and community remain the top priority. Please be assured that classroom protocols (i.e. lowered capacity, social distancing, required PPE) will be strictly followed and all resources will be deployed to assist with the limited number of face-to-face class offerings. Additionally, to mitigate risks, the majority of district employees will continue to work-from-home for the spring term. We will also continue to operate all student support services via online.

As a reference, below are the guidelines for higher education for each of the risk levels for counties within the state:

<b>Widespread (purple)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closed for indoor lectures and student gatherings</li> <li>• Some courses conducted in certain indoor settings, like labs and studio arts, may be open</li> </ul>
<b>Substantial (red)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity for indoor lectures and student gatherings must be limited to 25% of room capacity or 100 people, whichever is less</li> <li>• Some courses conducted in certain indoor settings, like labs and studio arts, may be open at regular capacity</li> <li>• Conduct student activities virtually when possible</li> </ul>
<b>Moderate (orange)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity for indoor lectures and student gatherings must be limited to 50% of room capacity or 200 people, whichever is less</li> <li>• Some courses conducted in certain indoor settings, like labs and studio arts, may be open at regular capacity</li> <li>• Conduct student activities virtually when possible</li> </ul>
<b>Minimal (yellow)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity for indoor lectures and student gatherings must be limited to 50% of room capacity</li> <li>• Some courses conducted in certain indoor settings, like labs and studio arts, may be open at regular capacity</li> <li>• Conduct student activities virtually when possible</li> </ul>
<p><i>This interim <a href="#">guidance for institutions of higher education</a> provides guidelines to help institutions and their communities plan and prepare to resume in-person instruction. It includes interim guidance for collegiate athletics to help plan for and prepare to resume training/competition.</i></p>	

I am certain you have many questions and we will work to get you answers as quickly as possible. Following this email, all faculty can expect to receive an update from the Office of Instruction to better outline the process to make adjustments to the schedule and to solicit volunteers for the late start face-to-face schedule for the spring 2021 term. Additionally, we will work to get information out soon regarding work-from-home agreements, scheduling, health and safety precautions for the spring term, and more.

As always, if you have specific questions/concerns, then please direct them to your supervisor and/or area dean. Thank you for your continued patience and support during this unprecedented time. We're moving towards more "normalcy," but we still have a long way to go—it will take a team effort and continued cooperation. Thank you in advance.

Regards,



**Chris Vitelli, Ed.D.**

*Superintendent/President*

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