

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY SUB-COMMITTEE

REPORT TO

PRP STEERING COMMITTEE

October 5, 2020

The Instructional Delivery Subcommittee met in two regular and one additional meeting to address the September 23, 2020 charge of the Steering Committee:

“Each subcommittee meets within the next two weeks to review current circumstances within their respective areas and make suggestions and recommendations, in writing, to the Steering Committee for changes in PRP for spring 2021 semester.

- 1. Suggestions due no later than close of business Monday, October 5 and should be emailed to the entire Steering Committee.*
- 2. Steering Committee will consider the changes and determine course of action by Wednesday, October 15.”*

The Subcommittee met in its reconstituted membership, which now includes an adjunct instructor and an undergraduate student (member of the Student Senate). The Subcommittee is still waiting to get a nomination for an additional member, a graduate student (preferably member of GSA).

Two main topics/questions were considered:

1. Should the Spring 2021 semester start a week later and the Spring Break eliminated?
2. Should the way of delivering courses in Spring 2021 be different from the approach followed in Fall 2020 and if so, what should be the new approach?

Should the Spring 2021 semester start a week later and the Spring Break eliminated?

Pros:

- It gives the opportunity to faculty and students to quarantine for 14 days in case they travel over the holidays get tested and have the results back before the semester starts.
- Eliminating the Spring Break reduces the likelihood of spreading the virus in case people travel over the break and eliminates the potential need of the entire population to undergo testing before returning to campus.

Cons:

- Delaying the start of Spring 2021 semester and as per the currently published schedule of Rutgers-Newark will make the two universities following a different calendar with negative implications for students and NJIT faculty in federated departments who may teach Rutgers courses.
- Students are looking forward to the Spring Break as a way to both relax and catch up with course work; eliminating it will create problems.
- Instructors teaching Spring courses may need to redesign their course syllabi as they may count the Spring break in their determination of deadlines for interim project reports.
- Adjunct faculty may be negatively impacted by a changed pay schedule.
- It will upset travel plans faculty and students may have already made for the Spring break.
- A number of internal processes will need to be updated/modified including, the academic calendar, when payments are due, determination of the period for financial aid, and the time of data reporting (determined by week of semester) thus, making comparisons with prior years more difficult.

Conclusion:

The Subcommittee recommends the Spring 2021 calendar not be modified (unless Rutgers makes a change, in which case the issue may be reconsidered). It also recommends the idea of starting the Spring 2021 semester with offering all courses in the synchronous online modality for the first week be considered.

Should the way of delivering courses in Spring 2021 be different from the approach followed in Fall 2020 and if so, what should be the new approach?

Based on limited data, the Subcommittee could only speculate on what are the reasons for which in-person attendance in converged courses this semester is low and appears to be declining over time. Among possible reasons are, health concerns especially if students are commuting, the low number of converged classes a student has in a given day making the time and cost of commuting significant, issues with the Back2classroom app, and the potentially indistinguishable approaches to teaching converged and synchronous online classes making students not seeing the benefit of coming to campus. It is, however, a concerning fact that attendance is much lower than anticipated, especially when the survey of students taking converged classes showed that they learn better in the classroom (32%) and equally well in the classroom or remotely (34%). For this reason, the Subcommittee recommends the following for Spring 2021:

- The same course modalities (converged, synchronous online, and online) be used.

- The converged courses be offered, in addition to lab courses, at all levels instead of 100- and 200-level courses.
- Each multi-section course have at least one converged section, to the extent possible.
- Do not offer converged courses during the 7:30 – 9:00 time slot.
- Utilize all time slots (except for the one mentioned above) and all days of the week (not excluding higher than Fall 2020 utilization of Saturdays and possibly utilizing Sundays) to ensure the offering of converged courses be maximized.
- Attempt to offer converged classes in patterns that allow students who opt for them to not end up with schedules involving a day with a single converged course (which will make them not attend).
- Have the departments decide, with the Deans' approval, which courses/sections they will be offering as converged (potentially giving them guidelines on the total number of courses to be offered as converged) but ask them to
 - make every effort to accommodate preferences and needs of as many instructing staff members as possible
 - make equitable distribution of converged courses among all categories of instructional staff
 - work with other departments to ensure (to the extent possible) conflict-free schedules for students who will opt for converged classes, and
 - ensure converged classes originally scheduled as such do not change modality at the last minute unless unforeseen needs arise.
- Request that all Spring 2021 instructors of converged classes attend seminars/workshops on technical and pedagogical aspects of the converged teaching modality.
- Ensure that the Back2Classroom app improves to allow better usage by both students and faculty.

The above-recommended changes for Spring 2021 imply a considerable amount of work for both the academic departments and the Registrar's Office before the schedule be published. As the time is of extreme essence, (the original plan was to start Spring 2021 registration at the end of October), the Subcommittee kindly asks the Steering Committee to make a final decision on this issue at its October 8, 2020 meeting.