

Greetings from Iowa State University!

Graduate students are important members of the Iowa State University community. We appreciate the many ways in which you contribute to the vibrancy of the university through your own education as well as by supporting our missions in teaching, research, and outreach. As we have planned for the fall semester, our priorities have been safety, health, and continuity of your academic progress toward your degree goals.

We are writing today to share information about Iowa State University's academic programs for the upcoming semester, and to address a few of the questions we know you have – as students, and in many cases, as graduate assistants – as you prepare for the fall.

Fall classes offered in multiple formats

One thing is for sure – the fall semester will not be “graduate school as usual.” As you have seen in previous communications, we will be offering a mix of in-person and online instruction, including classes that meet primarily face-to-face, classes that meet completely online, and classes that feature a blend of both. While Iowa State has always taught in those three instructional modes, a greater fraction of our courses this fall will be online or blended.

Face-to-face: Classes offered in-person will be similar to those offered traditionally in other semesters, but multiple changes—such as physical distance between seats in classrooms, enhanced cleaning, and required face coverings—will be made to improve safety and mitigate risk associated with exposure or spread of the coronavirus.

Online: Classes offered online will be similar to the past. The online content may be delivered asynchronously (accessed at any time) or synchronously (during a scheduled class time with real-time instruction, questions, and engagement). Online instruction may be supplemented with discussion boards, group work, online apps, and other activities to ensure an appropriate level of engagement between students and instructors.

Blended: Blended (also known as hybrid) courses will use a combination of face-to-face and online teaching, learning activities, and assessments. Online activities may include engagement with students and instructors meeting at the same time, and/or content delivered with participants accessing course materials independently. The particular mix will depend on an instructor's teaching strategies and the learning objectives of the course.

We have placed priority on preserving as many experiential learning opportunities as reasonably possible, including labs, studios, and other courses that use specialized equipment and spaces, while at the same time mitigating the risk of COVID-19 for both students and instructors—including graduate students serving as teaching assistants. If you will be a TA this fall, please consult with your assistantship supervisor about the best ways to mitigate infection risk within the particular learning environment of your class.

In some cases, students may be asked or required to rotate between attending class in person, or participating online to promote physical distancing and lower occupancy levels classrooms. While this is not likely to be the case for graduate courses, this option may be used in courses for which graduate students serve as TAs.

Class schedules available August 3

Our academic departments and colleges are currently making individual decisions as to how each of our 7400 fall courses will be offered delivered. These determinations are being based on course size, room and instructor availability, and safety protocols to mitigate student and instructor risk.

As you can imagine, this work is detailed and time-consuming, and we appreciate your patience. Class lists will be available on AccessPlus beginning August 3. Classes begin on August 17, and students may make changes to their schedules without instructor and/or adviser approval until Friday, August 21.

Changes to class schedules

In some cases, classes are being moved to a different meeting time and/or location based on the availability of classrooms.

In addition, starting and ending times for classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays have been changed to allow students and instructors more time to move between classes. On those days, the instructional day will begin 15 minutes earlier, and end 20 minutes later, than usual. The teaching schedule and passing times between classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays will not change, but classes on those days will be scheduled for 75 minutes.

While we are minimizing such cases, one or more of your course sections may be canceled. If this happens to you, we encourage you to consult with your adviser, major professor, and Program of Study committee members who can help you explore other options appropriate to your degree.

Choosing online courses

Some students, particularly those who may be at a higher risk for COVID-19, may prefer to take all of their fall classes online. Those students are encouraged to review the updated schedule of courses when it is released, and consult with their academic adviser to determine how best to maintain satisfactory academic progress, as not all classes will have an online option.

Completing coursework in quarantine or self-isolation

We want students to stay home when they are sick. It is likely that some students may need to self-quarantine or self-isolate during the semester. Many classes will have an online option for students to stay current with the course work. For classes that do not, instructors may provide alternative options for classes and assignments that are missed.

Accommodations for students concerned about their risk for COVID-19

Students at a higher risk to develop severe illness from COVID-19 based on their age or underlying medical condition, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control, will be given preference for placement in online courses. Additional information on this process can be found on the [Dean of Students website](#). However, it is important to note that we will not be able to offer all scheduled courses with an online option in cases such as labs where students use special equipment, or courses that feature a unique instructional experience.

Information for graduate assistants

As previously communicated, the changes to Iowa State University's fall 2020 academic calendar will not affect the stipends of graduate students who are appointed to assistantships. Because instruction begins earlier this year, appointing units also have the option to adjust those appointments to increase the fraction of the total stipend dispersed in August.

Additional information is available on the [Graduate College](#) website, including TA responsibilities on Labor Day, preliminary and final exams, and appointment dates for international students graduating in the fall.

While we know this is a lot of information, we do want to keep you up-to-date as we prepare for the fall semester. Please check ISU's [COVID-19 Planning website](#) for additional information and updates. If you have questions or need additional guidance at this time, please contact COVID-19@iastate.edu.

In the meantime, best wishes for a safe and healthy remainder of your summer!

With warmest regards,

Wendy Wintersteen
President

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