

Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
Task Force on Teaching Report
June 29, 2020

Introduction

As of June 2020, according to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* report, the number of Covid-19 cases among college-aged students is rising nationwide, due to off-campus gatherings in neighborhoods and bars. In response to this state of affairs, the President of the University of South Carolina at Columbia (a campus that, like Loyola and many others, is planning to reopen in the fall) has established an "acceptable risk," a limit beyond which the university would disperse and return to online instruction. What these recent outbreaks show is how difficult it will be to enforce coronavirus policies as the fall unfolds.

As faculty, we are concerned. We thus recently surveyed the entire MLL faculty (68 individuals) in order to collect their concerns, and suggested solutions, in light of the proposed Loyola plan to return to teach in person in the fall. Over half of the faculty has expressed a number of concerns on pedagogy, the pros and cons of the proposed delivery mode, and safety and health. In the spirit of collaboration, they have also offered possible solutions to some of these issues. In the following report, we summarize their questions and concerns, and highlight some of these solutions.

We sincerely hope that the administration will take our concerns and proposals under careful consideration. In the spirit of shared governance, we believe the faculty should be consulted and assume a substantial role in making critical judgments. In a time of crisis, given the centrality of university faculties in the mission of their institutions, their meaningful involvement in reviewing and approving measures that vitally affect the welfare of the institution (as well as their own) becomes truly essential.

General Concerns

One of the general concerns is the uncertainty of the teaching format (campus/online/dual) with less than two months until the start of the fall semester. A decision to hold on-campus instruction appears to be driven by financial concerns and not health concerns. Consequently, instructors feel pressured to teach on campus despite health concerns.

In lieu of focusing the attention on providing an on-campus experience, instructors propose prioritizing the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff by providing high quality online instruction for the fall. Additionally, members of the faculty would like to be made aware of plans for the possibility of a second or third wave of the virus. The faculty of MLL are deeply concerned by the COVID-19-related health hazards involved in returning to campus in the fall. We do not wish to assume or accept undue risk in this regard, and we therefore urge the institution to take all reasonable measures against such risks.

Furthermore, there is an uncertainty in providing a protocol for instructors who fall ill, who have no benefits, and are required to teach on campus. Other concerns involve being compensated for increased time/workload in planning a high-quality course, students and faculty having reliable internet access, extra teaching days since fall break was eliminated, reimbursement for technology costs for teaching online, live IT online support, expected online teaching modes and

no clear protocol on whether PPE will be provided. The mental health of students, staff and faculty is a concern. Finally, instructors are concerned about the safety of Loyola staff members- cafeteria workers, cleaners, security guards, etc.

Faculty, staff, and student health safety

In general, the faculty expressed its appreciation that the administration is doing its best to manage an extremely complex, difficult, and constantly evolving situation. However, several specific questions were raised regarding the health and safety of students, staff, and faculty. A major global concern is that the purported desire of students to be on campus seems to be prioritized over the safety of faculty and staff, who are being asked to assume considerable risk. That risk cannot be controlled, given that: 1) COVID-19 is an illness to which, so far as is currently known, *nobody* has resistance; 2) many students, as well as faculty, have to use public transportation just to get to campus; 3) many students work at jobs out in the world, and then will come to campus, bringing their exposure with them; 4) 18-year-olds in dorms can hardly be counted on to observe social-distancing protocols; 5) many classrooms and other campus spaces are poorly ventilated and cramped, and keeping any campus space cleaned and sanitized will be difficult; 6) enforcing social-distancing protocols in classrooms and other shared spaces will be nearly impossible; 7) likewise, without regular testing, tracing, and enforced quarantines, it will be impossible to prevent or contain the spread of illness. Some other issues that were raised include: 1) PPE costs money, and it is therefore a burden for many students and staff; 2) it is not clear what will happen to a course if a faculty member falls ill; 3) it is likewise not clear what will happen if, after (say) three weeks of being open, the university is forced to shut down again, as was the case in the spring.

Proposed solutions:

- Ensure frequent and thorough cleaning and sanitizing of classrooms and other shared spaces.
- Provide adequate PPE to students, staff, and faculty.
- Screening, testing, and contact-tracing of students, staff, and faculty.
- Give faculty the same freedom of choice (in-person vs. online) being afforded to students.
- Establish an “acceptable risk” limit to protect faculty and staff safety and be fully prepared to return to online-only instruction if (as seems likely) the risk goes beyond the limit.

Quality of courses in dual-mode teaching

Faculty would like a more specific definition of “dual-mode teaching” and what social distancing will look like in the classroom. Similarly, faculty is concerned with how to ensure maximum student involvement/engagement while preserving safety, especially with regards to group activities. Faculty is also concerned about how effectively languages can be taught and learned if the instructor and students are wearing masks. Ensuring the academic integrity on exams if the class is in-person and online is another issue. Regarding attendance, faculty is unsure of how to hold students accountable if they do not have a medical excuse. Faculty is uncertain about if and when they will receive training on everything dual-mode teaching entails. Regarding teaching evaluations, faculty is concerned with how the lower-quality instruction that comes with dual-mode teaching will affect our own yearly evaluation. When it comes to textbooks, the question

of how students who are not on campus will receive materials in a timely manner was brought up. Finally, faculty is concerned with how to help students build community, collaborate and network while practicing social distancing.

Proposed solutions

- Propose just a face shield so we can see each other's mouths.
- Ensure the availability of proper training on teaching in a dual mode.
- Pass a campus-wide policy on student attendance suited to dual-mode delivery.
- Consider temporary adjustments in faculty evaluation, including suspending the administration of student evaluations.

Live Streaming and Recording

A majority of the faculty expressed concerns with the live-streaming and recording technology that captures class sessions (Lecture Capture classrooms). First, there is the issue of intellectual property. The faculty would like clarification on who will have access to the recordings, and under what circumstances. If the university records courses on university-purchased software, faculty would like to know if course content would then become the intellectual property of the university. In addition, faculty is concerned with how the university will ensure that students do not distribute the intellectual work of professors and if this would fall under the auspices of Academic Integrity.

Second, faculty members who teach courses of modern languages and literatures raised pedagogical concerns, specifically if the live streaming of language courses is realistic and pedagogically sound. They fear that the availability of recorded lectures will discourage class attendance. They also remark that live-streaming/recording may work reasonably well for lecture courses, but discussion-based, communicative-based language classes, like the ones we teach, are extremely poorly suited to live-streaming/recording. Some instructors are concerned about losing classroom intimacy and students losing confidence to express themselves knowing their classes are being recorded. There are also technical problems that may arise - failure to record lectures, poor audio, inability to see PowerPoints or videos, inability to hear or participate in class discussion, poor connections, etc.

Proposed Solutions:

- Limit live-streaming to students attending the class. Give faculty the option to limit or prohibit the recording of their class sessions. Students should sign an Academic Integrity agreement that limits the use of recorded classroom content.
- Provide faculty and students clear property rights guidelines concerning the recorded material, which seem to be lacking so far.
- Ensure recorded sessions are only available for students with documented need to attend classes online only (to be sent to them by the instructor); they should be available for 24 hours, then deleted by the instructor.

