

To: All Faculty
From: Fall 2020 Planning Working Group
Date: May 2, 2020
Subject: Recommendations of the Fall 2020 Planning Working Group

The working group's recommendations are based on a desire to propose a choice of structures that most nearly replicates the College's commitment to students working in close collaboration with faculty, while acknowledging the possibility that the COVID-19 epidemic may make it infeasible for the College to offer an entirely classroom-based curriculum.

Goals of the group: Investigate and recommend curricular-structure options that ensure a successful fall term by preserving the most essential aspects of a Bennington education, including extensive one-on-one interactions with faculty, mentoring of student work, thoughtful advising, and an engaging, and substantive curriculum.

Design Constraints: We considered various organizational structures that would ensure student progress in light of the following probable constraints:

- Insofar as is possible with public-health policies and legal restrictions, it is desired that as much fall-term teaching as possible be done in-person;
- A significant fraction of students will be either unable or unwilling to come to campus due to travel restrictions, health concerns or other reasons;
- Some faculty will be unable to teach in-person courses due to underlying health conditions of their own or immediate family members;
- The numbers of students and faculty who will not be on campus may not be known until late summer, demanding that fall plans have inherent flexibility;
- The number of enrolled students in the fall will be lower than had been anticipated prior to the pandemic, with a working estimate of 580 being used for planning purposes, but with a wide window around that number being possible;
- There could be a very high number of first-year students who defer their matriculation (national surveys indicate that upwards of 30% of first-year students may opt to defer);
- A recognition that the regular academic calendar does not lend itself to the challenges [of remote teaching](#)

Summary Recommendation: Given the above constraints and considerations, the Working Group recommends:

- The Fall 2020 Term be split into two seven-week terms;
- Students take 8 credits per seven-week term;
- Four-credit courses will be completed in the seven-week time-frame;
- Faculty anticipating teaching in-person should plan courses with the expectation that hybrid delivery will be required, that is, some students will participate remotely and others will do so in-person;
- In recognition of the extra work that hybrid or remote course delivery will entail, the number of credits faculty are responsible to teach will be reduced. We recognize that there are likely to be many questions arising from individual circumstances, it is generally recommended that:

- Full-time faculty 8 credits in the fall and 8 credits in the spring, with 4 credits in each of the two blocks of the fall term;
- Part-time faculty will teach 2 credits less than stated in their contracts over the academic year
- One- and Two-credit courses can be offered
- Four-credit courses should not be split into consecutive two-credit courses if the first is a prerequisite for the second;
- If total enrollment exceeds current expectations, course enrollment caps will be revised as uniformly as possible to accommodate total demand;
- Performance and other courses that are especially challenging to teach remotely may be planned for exclusive in-person delivery, but will be limited in number and will require CPC approval;
- Faculty may be asked to participate in an expanded Gap-Year engagement program as part of their advising load
- Faculty may, if they wish, commit to teaching entirely remote courses.

Additionally, the Working Group recommends:

- That CPC set a timeline for a revised Fall Curriculum and establish protocols on how courses may be scheduled;
- That the revised curriculum be published at least one week prior to commencement;
- That APC review workload implications of the above proposals;
- That a separate body be established that will provide tangible means to support faculty in remote teaching

Rationale: The above recommendations provide for:

- Flexibility around changing public health scenarios - this structure allows for the possibilities of either a delayed start or a truncated term (in terms of on-campus residency), should either be warranted;
- Recognition of increased time demands of delivering courses simultaneously to in-person and remote populations;
- Accommodation of faculty and students who cannot participate in in-person teaching;
- Equitable reduction the number of courses across the faculty in anticipation of lower enrollment, while simultaneously building in a mechanism to accommodate larger enrollments;
- Accommodation of on-campus students who need to self-isolate if they develop Covid-19 symptoms or come into contact with anyone who develops Covid-19 during a contagious phase.

The Working Group acknowledges that this approach could be disruptive for some disciplines relative to our current academic calendar and encourages CPC to work with them to mitigate any negative impacts on teaching effectiveness

Residency Level Scenarios: The above recommendations are adaptable to various residency levels. The Working Group acknowledges that decisions around the number of students residing on-campus needs to prioritize the safety of students, staff and faculty, and needs to be made in full discussion with medical and operations staff. The range of scenarios includes:

- 100% residence: if it is possible for students to occupy residences and congregate as normal, the 7-week block curriculum will be delivered in person.

- Partial residence: this is the most likely scenario, with an indeterminate number of faculty and students not being able to participate in in-person teaching; students on campus will take the courses in-person if the faculty are so teaching, and remotely if the faculty cannot be on campus, and students not on campus will take classes remotely. The equity and safety issues around various permutations of these scenarios will need further consideration in terms of access to spaces, equipment, materials and courses.
- If it is not possible to have any students safely return to campus, the 7-week block curriculum will be delivered remotely. In such situations, faculty may need to remove from curriculum the courses that cannot be delivered remotely.

Other Options: The Working Group examined a number of other options including:

- Block Plan: this could potentially add even greater flexibility but at the cost of much greater disruption to faculty pedagogy and course structures
- Remote Start: this would be a 3 ½ week module block to start the term that would be entirely remotely delivered. This would be useful if we were sure that the pandemic would subside by autumn, but some epidemiological forecasts suggest that the pandemic will worsen later in the term and that September may be a good time to plan for students to be on campus.
- Delayed Start: this could allow more time for faculty to prepare courses but would require either shortening the term, limiting the credits students could earn, or would require extending the term into Field Work Term. This option also does not address the possibility that a second wave of the virus could occur later in the fall.
- Low-residency option and other low population models: Such options could be implemented if students can safely be on campus, but only at low numbers. These models are consistent with current public health recommendations but could introduce significant equity issues.
- Parallel Curricula: in this model, separate courses would be delivered remotely and in-person. This could introduce equity issues and would limit the curriculum for students on campus and studying remotely. It would also be difficult to plan given the uncertainty around how many students would need to be accommodated in each format.
- Flexible FWT: in this model, a 7-week FWT could be taken by students in either block of the fall term or during the normal FWT time. This adds flexibility to student scheduling but could greatly complicate coordinating schedules for others. We thought this might be a good option for some students who can't be on campus during part of the regular term, but would prove too unwieldy if implemented broadly. Further, funding issues around tuition payments and credit-bearing activity would have to be considered.