DATE: September 23, 2020
TO: All Instructors of Record, Fall 2020
Department Chairs, Deans
FROM: Karl Scholz, Provost
SUBJECT: Guidance for Resumption of In-Person Instruction

Let me begin by thanking you for the adjustments you and your students have made during this two week pause of in-person group instruction. Thanks to all of our collective efforts, and as announced by the Chancellor earlier today, starting this Saturday, September 26, we will begin a phased-in resumption of in-person undergraduate, graduate and professional school group instruction for those courses that began the semester in that modality. I am writing to you today to provide guidance about our approach.

A subset of group instruction courses identified by instructors in collaboration with their departments, schools and colleges may resume in-person instruction beginning September 26. These courses include, but are not limited to, those requiring specialized equipment, studio spaces, laboratory access, and field data collection. Instructors of these courses have or will be contacted by their schools and colleges that they are cleared to resume in-person instruction. Instructors of any course previously taught in-person or in a hybrid format can choose to resume in-person activities as of September 26 or later. Instructors of any course resuming its previous in-person or hybrid modality in this initial phase should contact students enrolled in their course(s) about the resumption of in-person activities no later than Friday, September 25.

For all other undergraduate, graduate and professional school group instruction that was offered face-to-face or hybrid prior to September 10, instructors can modify their approach to offering in-person learning activities between now and Thanksgiving. There are many possible paths an instructor can take, from returning to learning activities as initially designed to altering the frequency and composition of in-person interactions. For instance, this could mean meeting the class once a week or every-other week and doing the remaining contact with, say, synchronous remote instruction.

We strongly recommend the restoration of some in-person learning activities. We know how much students appreciate the in-person courses being taught. Moreover, we are not aware of any transmission of the COVID-19 virus in classroom settings at UW-Madison or elsewhere. However, instructors may seek a complete change in course modality when doing so best allows students to meet course learning objectives. In these situations, we will use the same process we used previously for the fall semester. Instructors should make a request to the department. Chairs and Deans will review each request and make decisions that meet the needs of students and maintains consistency within their School/College.

We realize that it takes time for instructors to work through the best strategy to support a given course’s learning objectives. If an instructor makes a modification to a course, they should notify students of these changes no later than Friday, October 2. In the interim, these courses will continue remote until new strategies are implemented. Please update your syllabus to reflect and document important changes.
Any individual (non-group) instruction (Independent Study, Internship, Senior Honors Thesis, Research) that was previously occurring in person and was suspended or moved to a remote interaction during this pause may re-commence in-person as of September 26, at the discretion of the instructor. This includes undergraduate research experiences for credit that may have been modified during the suspension of group instruction. Instructors wanting to resume having undergraduates in research laboratories should work with their departments to assure that they can be safely accommodated.

All clinical instruction in the Schools of Veterinary Medicine, Medicine and Public Health, Nursing, and Pharmacy will continue uninterrupted, just as it did during the suspension of group instruction.

Finally, any instruction that was remote prior to September 10 will continue in that modality going forward.

Because of the changes in recent weeks, we recommend that all instructors – whatever the current teaching mode – reach out to all students in their classes by Friday, September 25, to confirm the time and modality of the next class session.

Please work with your department chairs, your deans, or Vice Provost for Instructional Continuity Steve Cramer to resolve questions and concerns. We will all need to continue to move forward together.

I want to close this message by reiterating my thanks to all of you for everything you have done and will do to ensure the academic needs of all our students are met. This has been a difficult semester. I am deeply grateful for your understanding and your contributions to the university and beyond.