

Fall 2020 Departmental Plans Summary

The GSSM academic community is working to ensure the best learning environment possible during the COVID-19 transition. In order to help students know what is needed to succeed and to provide consistency across classes, the Academic Subcommittee of the Covid-19 Planning and Implementation Task Force approved a planning document over the summer. This document, "Expectations for Teaching and Learning in a Virtual Environment," was written by the Department Chair Group working in special session over two weeks. In the weeks just before the start of the fall semester, faculty from individual academic departments added sections to this document based on student and parent feedback, observations of student performance, and experiences of academic operations in spring and summer.

The current set of department plans, one for each academic department, covers several important areas concerning teaching and learning expectations. Each department is unique in terms of topic coverage and teaching methods. Each department plan was developed to best meet the needs of that department. The sections below describe specific expectations that are the same in all department plans. Common aspects found in the other expectations across department plans are also indicated.

1. Communicating with Students and Families

The emphasis is on responding quickly to students and parents (within the next working day) and making sure communication policy is clearly described in syllabi. Individual departments are also increasing their use of academic notices, being more proactive in reaching out to students who may need assistance, ensuring better knowledge of Canvas and Zoom communication functions and scheduling, and using GSSM e-mail and Canvas as the main means of communication.

2. Using Canvas for Class Management

All faculty will post all assignments on Canvas, post major assignments to Canvas at least 2 weeks in advance, post major assignments on Canvas so that these assignments will appear on the MASS scheduling system (ensuring faculty know the major assessments students have in other classes on any day), and remind students on Canvas of any regular assignments that are posted on another platform. Some departments are also using Canvas for grading assignments and posting artifacts from classes.

3. Office Hours

All faculty will allow office hours by appointment. Individual departments are setting open office hour policies for faculty and clearly stating in Canvas the best way for students to sign up for office hours.

4. Exam, Tests and Quizzes

Due to differences in the nature of the disciplines and the type of material covered across different departments, one assessment policy is difficult to create. However, each department has created a plan for assessment consistency. This consistency concerns the method of assessment delivery, the use of technology during assessments, and the clear communication to students of how assessment material is to be submitted. Some departments are recommending faculty change the nature of their assessments, such as by giving more quizzes to lower the weighting of tests and by giving more open book/note tests.

5. Posting grades in Canvas

All faculty will make the grades for individual assignments accessible through Canvas for the students to view. If grades are posted on other platforms, there will be a notice on Canvas letting students know how to access grades. Faculty will attempt to grade all major assignments within 2 weeks. If this is not possible, faculty will communicate this information to students and the appropriate Department Chair.

6. Using Zoom Effectively

Faculty will not hold students in class longer than the allotted class time (typically 53 minutes for each of the 3 weekly classes). Some departments will have all live instructor-led content recorded and shared on Canvas. Individual departments are recommending faculty follow Zoom best practices such as using breakout rooms often to give students time to work with each other, limiting the amount of time purely lecturing via Zoom, making sure students understand how to share screens and use polling, and considering the use of varied activities, such as guest speakers and asynchronous lectures, especially on Fridays, to reduce Zoom fatigue.

7. Balancing Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

Departments are determining individually how best to offer their content in live and recorded formats. The emphasis is on reducing student Zoom fatigue and providing students the opportunity to schedule learning activities efficiently.

8. Labs

Faculty are aware of the challenges involved in providing labs virtually. Much effort is going into deciding the best way to offer labs in different disciplines. Labs may include interactive simulations, asynchronous physical activities at home, or other individual and group-based activities. Labs will remain a time in which students actively engage with experiences different from traditional lecture that will still provide a feature-rich extra dimension to learning science.

Communication of the Individual Department Plan Information to Students and Families

Each department has developed a written description for how best to communicate its specific department plan to students and families. Most departments have elected to provide this information in syllabi.