Faculty of Science Teaching Programs

Dear Colleagues,

As we near the end of Summer semester it is timely that we pause and reflect on the transitions that have been imposed on our teaching programs throughout 2020 and look ahead to the start of the new academic year.

I wanted to acknowledge and sincerely thank all faculty, staff and students who have been involved in delivering our curriculum in a variety of modes over the last two semesters. Your adaptability and dedication to ensuring students have been able to progress through their programs has been outstanding. I also appreciate that the changes imposed on teaching delivery has been demanding on you all, compounded by the circumstances of working remotely.

It is worth reflecting on the enormity of changes that have taken place in the first half of the year. We have experienced one of the most dramatic transformations in university operations since SFU was established. Face to face delivery of teaching ceased, field research was paused indefinitely, lab-based research was closed down, and staff, faculty and students were required to work remotely. Notable changes to delivery of our teaching programs included:

- A rapid transition of teaching to online format at short notice toward the end of Spring Semester 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the urgency of the transition, faculty and staff made a range of sensible and pragmatic decisions to enable students to complete their semester.

- Summer Semester 2020 is the first full semester of solely online curriculum delivery.

- On May 13th the university made the decision that programs in Fall 2020 will also largely be delivered through digital means, with limited opportunity for face-to-face instruction. The comparatively early decision has allowed us to prepare more thoroughly for a second semester in which teaching will largely be via remote delivery.

It is also clear that COVID-19 will remain a prevalent public health issue in the community for the foreseeable future, and therefore, is likely to impact the potential to deliver courses in our traditional manner over the next 12 months.

At this time there are several updates that we wanted to bring to your attention.

Face to Face Teaching
While the vast majority of teaching will take place remotely in the Fall, the university undertook a careful process to allow limited face-to-face instruction. Principle criteria used by the Fall 2020 Planning Committee in allowing face-to-face instruction were:

- The safety of students, faculty and staff;
- Only essential material that could not be taught remotely would be considered;
- Only courses essential for student progression would be considered;
- Evidence that courses had been adapted to minimize student presence on campus.

The Science Faculty had 24 practical classes approved. It is important to note that in each case: fewer face-to-face meetings have been scheduled; classes are shorter in duration; the number of students in any lab has been reduced, necessitating an increased number of lab sections. In total less than 1% of curriculum material is being delivered through F2F means in the Fall.

**Logistics and Safety Planning**
While permission to offer practical classes is good news it also carries significant responsibility to ensure the classes can be delivered in a safe manner. As with the restart of our research operations we take safety planning of F2F teaching extremely seriously.

There are a number of principle concerns as we undertake this planning:

- We currently have ~650 faculty, staff and students working in our research laboratories.
- More than 1000 students will be undertaking some form of F2F teaching in the Science buildings in the Fall.
- In addition, there are other groups that access the common areas of the Science buildings.

Collectively the number of people that we may have in the Science buildings is significant in light of the ongoing health risks. Consequently, the Faculty is instituting a number of levels of planning in order manage these risks and maintain a safe work environment.

1. **Course Safety Plans**
Each course that is being offered in F2F mode must develop a course-specific SWP related to the teaching space. These SWPs follow the same procedures as research labs and should be developed by course instructors. Instructors will update SWPs to incorporate TA’s and technicians as appropriate. These SWPs will cover the operation of individual laboratory classes, within the footprint of the specific laboratory space.

If you are involved in teaching in semester two please contact your Department designate, Ruth Appanah or David Hik if you are unsure of the SWP requirements for your course or have concerns regarding safety processes.

2. **Student Safety in Lab Courses**

A student focused SWP is to be developed for each course that focuses on safe behavior and protocols, use of PPE etc. The Faculty is also developing communications for our students who will be coming to campus for practical sessions. Students will be required to undertake similar training as staff and faculty before coming to campus. In particular, students will also be required to complete self-assessments before coming to campus. *This step is our first and best approach to ensuring we keep our community healthy.*

3. **Faculty Safety Management**

The Faculty is developing a broader set of building SWP processes that deal with how we bring students into the Science buildings, creating waiting spaces and movement protocols. This planning is essential to minimize the presence of people in our common areas. More details on these plans will be distributed as they are finalized.

Details of the three scales of safety planning (above) are currently being finalized and implemented to enable our teaching to proceed in September. We will be communicating details of these processes as they become available.

It is worth highlighting the significant additional workload these processes are creating for faculty, staff and students. We appreciate your co-operation as work through the complexities of establishing the protocols that will allow F2F instruction in a safe manner.

**Faculty Teaching Awards**

Amid the transitions to remote working and loss of our face-to-face faculty meeting we have not had an opportunity to celebrate teaching successes. It is very timely to
celebrate and congratulate recipients of the Faculty of Science teaching awards for the 2019/2020 academic year for their outstanding contributions to our teaching programs.

Recipients of the Faculty Teaching Award are:

- Dr. Nadine Wicks - Biomedical Physiology and Kinesiology
- Dr. John Canal - Chemistry

Recipients of the Graduate Student Teaching Award are:

- Abigail Feresten - Biological Sciences
- Nastaran Yousefi - Chemistry

I am sure you will join me in extending our hearty congratulations to these awardees!

We also would like to use this opportunity to acknowledge all of the instructors, staff and teaching assistants across the entire Faculty who had to rapidly transition to remote learning under sudden and stressful circumstances during the Spring Semester. This was a massive effort and Faculty of Science is very proud of everyone who assisted with these efforts – thank you all.

Looking Ahead – Spring 2021

The Faculty and university is also turning its attention to Spring 2021. The university is currently considering the timeframe on when it will decide how teaching will be delivered in Spring 2021. This is likely to be in early Fall.

Given the ongoing health concerns it is the Faculty position that a return to full face-to-face teaching would seem unlikely in January. However, if we are able to effectively manage the face-to-face teaching in Fall, and pending external guidance, we are prioritizing the types of teaching activity that we can resume. Consequently, our current priorities, based on the maximum numbers allowed to meet, and continued requirements for social distancing, are:

- To restore our full suite of face-to-face instruction of practical courses and field experiences in 2021 as external guidance permits.
- To resume delivery of smaller-sized face-to-face lecture-based courses.
- Gradual resumption of all lecture-based courses.
If you have any questions or suggestions about the Faculty of Science plans for teaching and instruction during the coming months, please feel free to reach out. We are all learning as we adapt to these new circumstances.

Lastly, I do hope you are able to enjoy the long weekend.

Kind regards
Paul