In April 2021, ASC Executive Dean Gretchen Ritter asked the Teaching Transition Committee to reconvene to make recommendations for the return to in-person instruction during the Autumn semester. The following faculty, staff, and students served on the committee:

Ian Anderson (.1234), Academic Technology Consultant, ASC Tech
Andy Blosser (.31), Senior Lecturer, Music
Stephanie Brown (.2596), Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Newark campus
Liana Crisan-Vandeborne (.1), Business Intelligence Senior Analyst, ASC
Ron Filippelli (.2), Director, Facilities Management, ASC
Jillian Finkel (.28), Undergraduate student, History and Political Science
David Horn (.5), Associate Executive Dean for Undergraduate Education, ASC
Mary Ellen Jenkins (.196), Assistant Executive Dean for Advising and Academic Services, ASC
Vlad Kogan (.18), Associate Professor, Political Science
Laura Lisbon (.1), Professor and Chair, Art
Maria Miriti (.1), Associate Professor, EEOB
Wendy Panero (.1), Professor, Earth Sciences
Laura Seeger (.16), Web and eLearning Manager, History
Darla Munroe (.9), Professor and Chair, Geography
Sergio Soave (.1), Associate Executive Dean for Space and Infrastructure, ASC
Jane Taylor (.3276), Undergraduate student, Neuroscience
Jessica Vandevord (.1), Graduate student, Chemistry
Bernadette Vankeebergen (.1), Assistant Dean for Curriculum, ASC
Elizabeth Vu (.191), Director of Distance Education, ASC

The committee’s updated charges were as follows:

1. To review the experience of the past year and identify lessons learned that can inform future practice,
2. To identify particular challenges and opportunities as we return to predominantly in-person instruction in the Autumn,
3. To identify new and emerging resources that support effective teaching in this context.

As with the committee’s first report in 2020, what follows is meant to provide support and guidance to instructors in ASC, and to stimulate conversations in academic units, rather than to be prescriptive. Additional information may soon be available from university committees working on fall “reactivation.”

Sections:

1. University and college plans for Autumn semester
2. Lessons learned during COVID
3. Challenges and opportunities ahead
4. Additional resources
1. University and college plans for Autumn semester

Calendar

The university expects to return to a normal calendar for Autumn semester, including a mid-semester break (October 14–15).

Modes of instruction

The university’s current plans for Autumn semester are that at least 75% of classes will be offered fully in person or with significant in-person components. ASC is currently on a path to exceed this goal.

It is still possible that some students, especially new first-year students, will have schedules with multiple large lecture courses that are only offered online, but even many of these will have in-person labs or recitation sections. In some cases, in-person classes will be expected to offer remote access to students who have been granted an accommodation by Student Life Disability Services (SLDS) (see below).

Assessment

We do not expect that emergency grading procedures will be in effect in Autumn 2021.

Classroom density

Beginning in the Autumn, reduced density will not be required in most classrooms. The Registrar announced on May 28 that in-person classes with 100 or fewer students can be offered at 100% of the pre-COVID classroom capacity, while classes of more than 100 students can be offered at 75% capacity.

Other safety protocols

As of June 9, the University has lifted the mask requirement for students, staff, and faculty who are fully vaccinated. Unvaccinated members of the university community are still expected to continue to wear masks and to maintain social distancing. Departments and individual faculty may encourage masking by vaccinated members of the community on a voluntary basis. Additional guidelines for classroom spaces are expected before classes begin in the fall. The most reliable (and frequently updated) source for information on current safety protocols is the University’s Safe and Healthy Buckeyes website.

The University does not currently plan to require students to obtain vaccinations, and instructors may not ask whether an individual student has been vaccinated. The University will collect information about vaccination status from students and employees on a voluntary basis in order to estimate campus-wide rates of vaccination.

Technology in the classrooms

The University has equipped every pool classroom with a camera that can be used to stream or record lectures. ASCTech has been working with academic units to ensure that the technology needs of the classrooms they control are being met. For updated information on ASCTech resources available in the fall, visit their Back to Campus page. Additional questions can be directed to Ian Anderson.
Student fees for distance education

The Board of Trustees has eliminated the fee differential that enabled out-of-state students to pay almost $10,000 less if they had no in-person or hybrid classes in a given semester. As a result, there should no longer be pressure on instructors or departments to change modes of delivery to save some students money.

Course assurances and approvals

Any course that was previously reviewed for temporary DL offering using the assurance process can be offered online again in the Autumn. Those assurances are expected to expire at the end of the calendar year. Courses that have been permanently approved for online offering using the regular ASCC review process can be offered in distance or hybrid modes at any time.

In the unlikely event that a course needs to be offered as DH or DL in the fall and was not previously reviewed using the assurance process, it may be submitted for assurance review during the summer using the forms previously made available to departments.

The regular or permanent offering of courses that are more than 75% online (DH and DL) will continue to require formal approval by ASCC. In the Spring, the ASC Curriculum Office, the ASC Office of Distance Education, and ASCTech worked together to develop a new template for distance education syllabi and a new cover sheet for the approval process. Those forms can be viewed at the ASC curriculum website.

2. Lessons learned during COVID

Online and hybrid delivery

Beginning in the Spring of 2020, when every course in the college moved abruptly to online delivery, ASC instructors did a remarkable job adapting their modes of delivery, syllabi, assignments, and practices of assessment to the COVID context. Use of Carmen increased to nearly 100% in Spring 2020, and since that time new ASC Carmen templates for distance learning have improved the online experience for both instructors and students. The assurance process sought to guarantee that each ASC course would meet university standards of accessibility and provide students regular and meaningful interactions with instructors. ASC faculty volunteers reviewed more than 1200 assurance forms and syllabi, while the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee (ASCC) reviewed more than 260 proposals for permanent online status.

Surveys of students and instructors were conducted three times during the pandemic. In April–May 2020, the Office of Student Academic Success (OSAS), the Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning, the Center for the Study of Student Life, and the Office of International Affairs conducted a survey of students and faculty focused on teaching and learning during the Spring semester. In November 2020, the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) conducted a student survey on COVID-19 and grading policies that also solicited useful information regarding economic, technological, and mental health challenges faced by undergraduates. Finally, at the end of Autumn 2020, the Student Success Executive Sponsors group organized a series of listening sessions with faculty, staff, and students to assess the particular needs of first- and second-year students as they return to campus in the fall. A summary of those sessions can be found here.

It is difficult to make broad generalizations about distance learning and hybrid experiences during the 2020-2021 academic year, as much depended on students’ geographical locations, access to
broadband and computers, home departments, and the size and nature of courses they were taking each semester. However, a few patterns emerge.

A. Workload and assessment

Several student comments and complaints focused on what they perceived to be increases in their workload during COVID, particularly in fully online courses but also cumulatively across all the courses they took. In an effort to ensure regular interactions with students, many instructors added discussion boards on Carmen and required frequent (usually weekly) postings by students. This sometimes came in addition to the assignments normally required for the in-person version of the course, resulting in an overall increase of work for students. What's more, some students found instructors did not have adequate time to respond, or to respond meaningfully, to the posts made by students. Several complained in surveys and in focus group meetings that the required discussion posts therefore felt like busywork or a “waste of time.” Other comments focused on inflexible assignment deadlines, attendance policies, and grading practices students felt were poorly suited to the pandemic context.

By contrast, students commented favorably on courses that made meaningful use of discussion boards, allowed flexibility in participation, and substituted more frequent, lower-stakes forms of assessment for high-stakes exams.

Many students, including some who were taking hybrid course in person, commented in surveys on the value of having lectures and class discussions recorded for later review. Some pointed out that this was especially valuable for non-native speakers of English.

B. Community and connection

Students in fully online courses, especially larger courses that were offered asynchronously, reported difficulties feeling connected to the course, to the instructor, and to other students. Indeed, the problem of building community, in and outside the classroom, was very broadly felt. In the November 2020 USG survey of 6819 students, when the university offered a mix of in-person, hybrid, and online courses, 25% of students reported “not thinking of themselves as a college student,” and 73% felt “out of touch with the Ohio State community.” Only 29% said they had interacted with their classmates inside the classroom, and only 21% outside the classroom.

This problem was no doubt intensified because many of the mechanisms for building community outside the classroom were disrupted — from early-arrival programs run by ASC Recruitment, to student clubs and service organizations, to the regular dynamics of departmental and residential life.

C. Access

Regular and uninterrupted access to the internet was a particular challenge in the early months of the pandemic, but also persisted for some students, particularly low-income students and students in rural areas. In the USG survey (November 2020), 10% of students reported “less than adequate” access to internet connectivity, and 10% to necessary computer hardware.

For students in other time zones, and in particular international students, classes with significant synchronous components posed the most persistent challenges. Some students reported having to join Zoom classes while other members of their families slept and found it difficult to have their cameras on and to participate orally.

Many of these students said they found it helpful to have recordings of synchronous sessions available for consultation at other times, though they missed the opportunity to ask questions and
participate in discussions. Some international students also found it easier to follow and take notes on subtitled recorded lectures they watched asynchronously.

D. Hybrid delivery

The most frequent complaints from instructors focused on the challenges of hybrid delivery. Several instructors observed that simultaneously teaching students who were in person and others who were participating by Zoom often felt like teaching two classes, neither of them well. In some classrooms, the available technology did not allow for students to be seen on camera or easily heard. Classes that were split into sections that were meant to alternate between in-person and remote instruction instead tended to drift toward online delivery. In some cases, only a handful of in-person students remained, while the vast majority of the class participated by Zoom. Financial incentives for out-of-state students to take all of their classes online pushed many to ask faculty to change hybrid sections into fully online sections.

Successful hybrid courses seem to have benefitted from setting clear expectations, both on the syllabus and during the semester, about in-person attendance. But the sense that these courses were consistently the hardest to manage and teach was nearly universal.

Mental health and wellness

National and local studies confirm that the COVID epidemic increased already high rates of mental health challenges among students. For example, a survey conducted by the Office of the Chief Wellness Officer (“COVID-19 Safe Campus Report for Ohio State Students, Faculty, and Staff: The Continued Return to Campus Survey”) in April 2021 found that 28.3% of student respondents screened positive for depression (up from 24.1% the previous August), 42.6% screened positive for anxiety (up from 39%), and 71% screened positive for “burnout” (up from 40%). Students of color had particular high rates of positive screenings, as did regional campus students. Generalizing the results to the entire Ohio State student body, the authors estimated that roughly 29,000 students were struggling with anxiety in April 2021, and 19,000 with depression.

A national study conducted by the American College Health Association in Spring 2021 found similarly alarming results. 26.9% (including 29.5% of undergraduates) had a “positive suicidal behavior screening,” meaning they were potentially at risk for suicide. 1.5% of respondents said they had attempted suicide within the previous 12 months. Overall, 43.5% were characterized as having either serious or moderate psychological distress, and 54.2% screened positive for loneliness.

Academic misconduct

Many departments, and particularly those that rely on infrequent and high-stakes testing, reported significant increases in academic misconduct during the pandemic. As the committee noted in its earlier report, the Proctorio software upon which Ohio State has relied to monitor student behavior during remote testing is not compatible with the iPads that many of our students now use and proved ineffective at assuring academic integrity.

Some departments and instructors in ASC developed alternatives to timed, closed-book, high-stakes assessments to reduce pressure on students during the pandemic.

Remote office hours and advising

At the same time, many students, faculty, and staff reported positive changes in some kinds of activities. For example, some instructors experienced higher than normal rates of attendance at office hours when these were conducted through Zoom, while students said they appreciated the
ease of not having to come to campus to connect with faculty. Some instructors extended office beyond the normal end of the workday or held group office hours that allowed students to learn from each other as well as from the instructor.

Similar results were reported by ASC advisors: undergraduates were more likely to make and keep Zoom appointments than is normally the case with face-to-face appointments.

3. Challenges and opportunities ahead

Modes of delivery

The college is in the process of building out the ASC Office of Distance Education (ASCODE), and in the fall will have a small number of instructional designers available to help with online course development.

In its July 2020 report, the ASC teaching transition committee recommended that instructors design online and hybrid courses using strategies that initiate and promote substantive and meaningful interaction with the course instructor and peers. The advice continues to be relevant, and there are now syllabi in every department that can serve as models for achieving these goals.

As mentioned above, building community in online classes was frequently identified as a challenge during Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021. In May 2021, the ASCODE organized a forum specifically focused on this challenge. A recording of that panel discussion, featuring instructors and instructional designers, is available here.

Perhaps the most significant challenge in the fall, as in previous semesters, will be teaching in hybrid and hy-flex modes. These classes not only impose technological and pedagogical demands on instructors but have also been plagued by the problem of drifting toward fully online. Preventing this drift may depend on instructors making clear in advance what their expectations are for student attendance and participation in hybrid classes. These expectations can be included in the SIS record or sent to students in an email in advance of the first day of classes, as well as spelled out on Carmen. The challenges and opportunities of multimodal delivery were addressed in an ASCODE forum available here.

Finally, instructors of some fully in-person classes may be asked to make accommodations that enable some students to participate remotely (see below).

Accommodations

As before, instructors of in-person and hybrid classes will be expected to make reasonable accommodations for students who are unable to be safely present in the classroom and have been approved for an accommodation by the office of Student Life Disability Services (SLDS). Updated information on managing accommodation requests is available here.

International Students

Some international students may face particular challenges in the fall. The Office of International Affairs reports that many may have difficulty being physically present in the fall, because of difficulties associated with vaccine distribution, visas, or travel restrictions. Some of these students will seek online options, including asynchronous delivery that allows them to access class materials in other time zones. The exact number of affected students is not known at this time.
In the case of graduate students, programs may have a good sense of the particular students who will face challenges and can therefore make necessary adjustments. In the case of undergraduates, it may be more difficult for programs and individual instructors to know in advance how many students will request online access.

Departments may wish to pursue solutions that are tailored to the compositions of their student bodies and the demands of their curriculum. In the case of large online lecture courses, some units may wish to consider offering an online recitation or lab section. It may make sense to plan in advance to offer some core or required graduate or undergraduate courses (especially if these are not frequently offered) in a hybrid or “simulcast” mode.

However, unlike the case of students granted an accommodation by SLDS, there is not currently an expectation that individual instructors will need to make last-minute adjustments to their modes of delivery to meet the needs of international students who have enrolled in their classes and cannot be present in person. Advisors can work with these students to find alternative classes, and in some cases it may be necessary for international students to withdraw for a semester.

In addition to this broad concern, some international students with limited transportation options are likely to arrive after the start of classes and may benefit from additional flexibility during the first weeks of the course. We expect the university to issue guidance on addressing this situation.

*Mental health and wellness*

Mental health and wellness experts, both on our campus and nationally, anticipate that the fall will be a challenging time for our students, as well as for staff and faculty. The challenges may be particularly great for first and second-year students. Most first-year undergraduates will have had senior years that were largely online or socially distanced, and very few will have had opportunities to visit campus before the fall. Even a large number of our second-year students have not yet spent time on campus, and many of those who have were not able to build the kinds of social networks that normally provide support during the early years of college and graduate school. Experts therefore expect that many students will feel more overwhelmed than usual by an abrupt immersion into a socially complex university environment.

The university anticipates that mental health and wellness services will be available both in person and virtually in the fall. Resources available to address mild, moderate, and severe mental health concerns can be found at the Counseling and Consultative Services (CCS) website.

Every semester, some students seek mental health accommodations for their classes. That number may well increase in the fall, and may include some requests for remote access to in-person classes. SLDS recommends that any request for accommodation go through their offices (see above).

Within ASC, the Student Mental Health and Wellness Committee met throughout the past year to identify resources in and outside the classroom that could support ASC undergraduates and graduate students during and after the pandemic. That work will continue in the fall. The teaching committee heard from the chair of the mental health and wellness committee, Professor Jen Cheavens (Psychology), who outlined some of the work in which her committee has been engaged. This has included developing resources for instructors (for example, to help them “check in” on their students), using social media to engage students, and proposals for more systematic mental health training (for example, online courses) for both instructors and students.

The mental health and wellness committee has also recommended that the college hire “embedded” counselors to serve the specific needs of ASC students, increase the visibility of mental health
resources in the buildings they frequent, and further destigmatize mental illness and its treatment. The college is now in the process of hiring its first counselor, a member of the CCS staff who will spend four days a week in an ASC building and will be available to work with both undergraduate and graduate students. (ASC student can also continue to use counselors in CCS’s main offices, in Younkin Center and Lincoln Tower).

For a second year, the college will offer a one-credit online course (ASC 5194) on wellness and mental health, team-taught by Jen Cheavens and Dan Strunk. The course is open to both undergraduates and graduate students.

**Welcoming second-year students**

Departments may want to pay special attention to the needs of second-year students this fall. Many will have missed departmental welcome and orientation events last year and could benefit from being included in experiences normally limited to first-year students. Units might also consider extending any peer advising and mentoring programs to include second-year students.

**Other opportunities for online access**

Instructors may want to consider continuing to provide virtual office hours if it increases the likelihood that students will attend. Some instructors found group online office hours also encouraged the participation of otherwise reticent students.

As noted above, many students, and especially non-native speakers of English, appreciated having recordings of lectures and discussions available for review on Carmen. In the future, recordings could be made for this purpose even of wholly in-person lectures. However, instructors who provide recordings will also want to set clear expectations about in-person attendance, and to clarify that the recordings are meant to supplement, rather than substitute for, the live experience. Instructors should also inform students on the syllabus that classes may be recorded for educational purposes.

**4. Resources**

*Additional resources for online and hybrid teaching*

The resources previously available on the University’s Keep Teaching website have now moved to the Teaching and Learning Resource Center. The Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning continues to provide more general instructional support, including course design and assessment.

Later this year, the ASC Office of Distance Education will have developed its own resource pages (including links to relevant university sites). Interested instructors can also join the ASC Distance Education Working Group on Teams.