

**AY 2020–21 ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION:
GUIDANCE FOR COLLEGES, SCHOOLS, DEPARTMENTS, AND PROGRAMS
FROM THE ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION IMPLEMENTATION TEAM**

Edition 7: October 30, 2020

Topics: Spring 2021 Academic Calendar and Instruction Modes; Planning Your Spring 2021 Syllabus; Pass/Fail for AY 2020-21; Fall 2020 Final Exams and FCQs; Snow Days

Relevant Due Dates for Chairs and Directors: Changed Course Instruction Modes Ongoing after October 30 (If Needed)

Update from the Academic Instruction implementation team

This semester, the implementation team has been advising campus leadership on measures needed to carry out academic instruction in light of changing circumstances. As of this month, we've turned primarily to planning the spring 2021 semester, using what we've learned from fall 2020 to repeat successes and to adjust course when necessary.

Please email this entire edition of guidance to your faculty, your graduate students with teaching appointments, and your academic support staff.

Past and current guidance editions available on the Academic Affairs website

Past and current editions of Academic Instruction guidance and their supporting materials are now available [on the Academic Affairs website](#). SharePoint access is no longer needed.

What's in this edition of guidance, and what's coming soon

This edition of guidance focuses primarily on the implementation and details of the provost's e-memo to faculty and graduate students about expectations for spring 2021. It also includes some items that pertain to completing the fall 2020 semester, including pass/fail, exams, and FCQs.

We will publish at least one additional guidance edition this semester, focusing especially on pedagogy resources, academic technology, and academic and study space, as well as any other topics that arise concerning planning for the spring semester and for 2021's Summer Session.

Please continue to send questions, requests for clarification, and requests for further guidance. Your communications are welcome and help shape our decisions about instruction and instructional support

and our recommendations to campus leadership. Individual faculty and other instructional personnel should direct questions to their chairs and directors. Chairs, directors and school/college administrators should send all queries and requests regarding Academic Instruction implementation to [Katherine Eggert](#), Senior Vice Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment.

Tell your faculty, staff, and students: spring 2021 academic calendar

[As announced by Provost Moore and COO O'Rourke](#), the spring 2021 academic calendar eliminates spring break in order to help reduce travel-related spread of COVID-19. To replace our typical five-day spring break, the spring semester begins three days later and includes two Wellness Days for a brief break from classes.

CU Boulder Main Campus semester

The Main Campus semester (with the exception of the Law School and Continuing Education) will follow the calendar below. Note the **items in red, which are important changes from the original academic calendar** that will affect faculty and staff in academic units.

- Sunday, Jan. 10: Move-in begins for some 500 incoming students; spring welcome/welcome back programming begins.
- Monday - Wednesday, Jan. 11-13: Check-in for about 6,000 returning students
- **Thursday, Jan. 14 First day of classes**
- **Friday, Jan. 15: Wednesday class meeting pattern used; this will balance out instructional weekdays & contact hours**
- Monday, Jan. 18: MLK, Jr. Day – No classes
- **Wednesday, February 17: wellness day off for students**
- **Thursday, March 25: wellness day off for students**
- **No spring break**
- **Friday, March 26 staff holiday may be moved, TBD**
- Thursday, April 29: Last day of classes [no change]
- Friday, April 30: Reading day [no change]
- May 1-5: Final exams [no change]
- May 6: Spring conferral for May graduates [no change]; plans for spring commencement are pending

Calendar for special session courses

The start and end dates of special session (shorter-term) classes that take place within the spring semester will be adjusted to match the new spring academic calendar. **Note: special session classes that begin at the regular semester start will follow the Main Campus plan for Friday, Jan. 15: Wednesday class meeting patterns will be used on this day. See [Special Session calendars](#).**

Law School calendar

The first day of classes for Colorado Law is Monday, Jan. 11. **Note: unlike the rest of Main Campus, Law School classes on Friday, Jan. 15 will not change their meeting pattern: the regular Friday class meeting pattern will be used on this day.** See the full spring 2021 academic calendar for Colorado Law [here](#).

Continuing Education calendar

The academic calendar for term-based courses in Continuing Education is slightly different from the Main Campus calendar. Details for spring 2021 are being finalized and will be posted on the [CE program description](#) page and [course search page](#).

Registration dates and student deadlines

The spring schedule of classes will be published on Monday, Nov. 2. [Registration](#) begins Monday, Nov. 9.

All [student deadlines for the spring semester](#)—drop/add, pass/fail, withdrawal, tuition payment, etc.—have been adjusted by the Office of the Registrar and by the Bursar to match the revised academic calendar.

Tell your instructional personnel: planning a spring 2021 syllabus with the revised academic calendar

Altered meeting pattern on Friday, January 15 (except for Law School classes)

If you teach on Wednesdays or Fridays, please note this important change: **Friday, January 15 will use a Wednesday class meeting pattern, except for classes in the Law School.** Students (except for Colorado Law students) should go to their Wednesday classes on Friday, January 15, including the same class meeting times and classrooms (where applicable).

This change is required to keep the number of instructional week days and contact hours for each course the same as previously scheduled, despite the revised academic calendar.

Communication is being planned to help inform and remind students and faculty about this change.

Wellness Days: no classes or other academic activities, and no exams or big assignments the next day

The Wellness Days of Wednesday, February 17 and Thursday, March 25 are break days. No classes will be held, and faculty should not schedule review sessions, makeup classes, and the like on those days. **Please also do not have exams or major assignments due the day after a Wellness Day,** so that our students can truly take a day away from what will be a demanding, compressed spring academic schedule.

Workloads for remote and online courses

This semester, the deans and provost have heard from many students that their remote and online courses have a higher workload of assignments than is typical for those courses. For example, a remote course might require the usual number of essays and/or exams, but also require a number of online discussion posts. While there are sound pedagogical reasons for assigning new kinds of work in a remote or online course, please assess the overall workload for the course if you are making new kinds of assignments, and adjust to the norm if necessary.

Scheduling and conducting midterm exams

- Due to physical distancing protocols, common in-person midterm exams are not permitted unless fewer than 50 students are involved and space is available. Departments that hold large in-person common midterm exams should hold those exams online.
- Midterm exams for completely online (asynchronous) courses should be offered over a time window, inclusive of start and completion times, of at least 24 hours. This time frame assists students who are taking the class from different time zones and makes sure students can take the exam without having to skip an in-person or remote (synchronous) class.
- Midterm exams for remote (synchronous) classes are normally given within the designated meeting time for that course. If an instructor wants to give students a longer time window in which to take the exam, that time window, inclusive of start and completion times, should be at least 24 hours and should include the entirety of the designated meeting time for that class. This time frame makes sure students can take the exam without having to skip an in-person or remote (synchronous) class.

Scheduling and conducting final exams

See below for final exams in fall 2020; the same guidance will apply to spring 2021.

Work with your department: general principles for course offerings and teaching assignments

As departments, programs, colleges and schools make final changes to course offerings and teaching assignments, please keep these general principles in mind. Most of them carry over from fall 2020, but #2 is an important shift.

1. Every department, program, college and school and program should make a significant and meaningful number of in-person learning experiences available to its students, both undergraduate and graduate. Experience from fall 2020 has taught us that our classrooms are safe environments: to date, we have had no report of COVID-19 transmission in the classroom. We should thus feel confident about teaching in person in our well-ventilated classrooms as long as instructors and students alike follow masking and distancing protocols.
2. Unlike for fall 2020, there will be no target percentages of in-person courses for each department, program, college or school. Departments and deans will define appropriate course instruction modes in concert with faculty and other instructional personnel. However, do keep in mind principle #1: we're committed to providing significant opportunities for in-person instruction to all our students.

3. Just as in fall 2020, in-person teaching should focus especially on courses for first-year students; lab, studio, and performance courses; capstone seminars; recitation sections.
4. Just as in fall 2020, some students will want to sign up for solely remote or online courses. The percentage of students in this category in fall 2020 was small, less than 10% of all undergraduate and graduate students. Students in this category should be able to find enough remote and online courses to make progress toward their degrees, but they cannot expect that every course they might want to take will be offered in an online or remote mode. They should work with their academic advisors to plan their schedules.
5. Departments, programs, colleges and schools should work with their instructional personnel, including GPTIs and TAs, to determine a fair way of assigning in-person, remote/online, and hybrid courses and sections. If you're a department or program chair/director and need help with this task, please consult your dean.
6. No academic unit should assume that all GPTIs and TAs are able to teach in person. Please consult with your graduate students about instructional mode the same way you do with your faculty members.

Work with your instructional personnel and update the Registrar: new guidance on instruction modes for spring 2021

This fall semester, instruction modes proved confusing and taxing for faculty and students alike. This was particularly true for in-person and hybrid in-person courses. Faculty were burdened by students in in-person classes asking to attend remotely, and students had trouble understanding the variety of class-meeting schedules for hybrid in-person classes. Most of all, faculty and students have felt wearied by the number of changes that their courses have undergone this semester. While the campus can't control the possibility that we'll have to respond to a public health order by taking our in-person classes remote for a short time, we can improve on our fall 2020 approach and reduce the confusion for all by making instruction modes simpler and more consistent in spring 2021. This new guidance on instruction modes is designed toward that end.

Consistent course instruction mode

For spring 2021, a course will not shift its instruction mode mid-semester, barring any short-term restrictions stemming from state or local public health guidance. Both instructors and students will commit to maintaining assigned course instruction modes throughout the semester, as published in the schedule of classes. This also is important for consistent and accurate reporting, fee assessment and health and safety (contact tracing) purposes.

What this means:

- Students can't ask for an alternative instruction mode—what they sign up for is what they get.
- If a student in an in-person course is away from class due to COVID-19 (or other reason), instructors should make their usual provisions for a student absent from an in-person class: give them make-up work, share slides or recordings after the class, ask them to get notes from a classmate, etc.
- Department/program chairs and directors should make the usual provisions for an instructor who must be absent from an in-person class due to illness or emergency. The normal provision

will be to have a substitute instructor; however, chairs and directors have the latitude to make their own best judgments for continuity of instruction, depending on such factors as how long an instructor will be absent. If a short-term shift in instruction mode is necessary (e.g., an instructor is under quarantine and can teach remotely, and a substitute instructor is not an option), that decision may be made by a chair, director, or dean as appropriate.

- Any permanent shift in instruction mode due to a change in instructor or a long-term change in instructor circumstances requires approval from the dean. The department will notify the Office of the Registrar, who will change the instruction mode in the schedule of classes. Classes must be offered in the instruction mode that is published in the schedule of classes, unless required by public health order or because of instructor emergency. Instruction mode shifts for instructor emergencies will typically be short-term (e.g., instructor is under quarantine).

Narrower definitions of hybrid classes

In order to reduce student confusion about expectations for a hybrid course, we will be narrowing the definition of hybrid for the spring 2021 semester.

- Any course that meets only once a week cannot be hybrid. It must be entirely in-person, entirely remote, or entirely online. This normally includes lab sections or recitation sections that meet once a week; any exceptions for lab or recitation sections must be approved by the dean.
- A hybrid in-person/remote or hybrid in-person/online class must meet one of the following definitions. Courses currently designated hybrid in-person/remote or hybrid in-person/online that do not meet one of these definitions must be moved either to entirely in-person, or to entirely remote or online.

EITHER

- The course is simultaneously in-person and remote for every class session, with the instructor in the classroom. Instructors teaching in this mode must teach in the classroom even if most or all of the students are remote, and instructors agreeing to teach in this hybrid mode agree to this stipulation. Use of a Tech Co-pilot (including TAs or LAs trained as tech co-pilots) is highly encouraged. Classes with “rolling attendance” models meet this definition. (“Rolling attendance” means that a class size is larger than the room capacity, and the students attend in person on a rolling basis: a T-Th class of 40 students where 20 can attend in person on Tuesday and 20 on Thursday, for example.)

OR

- The course is taught in-person at least one class session per week, with the other day(s) remote or online. The in-person and remote or online day(s) are the same from week to week, on a regular pattern.

Submitting changes in instruction mode to the Office of the Registrar

Academic Scheduling has been in communication with department/program schedulers about the possible need to change hybrid courses to entirely in-person or entirely remote, in order to meet the above definitions of hybrid courses. Some departments are making additional kinds of changes in courses’ instruction mode. **Changes in instruction mode that were submitted by noon on Thursday, Oct. 29 will be visible to students when the schedule of classes is published on Nov. 2.** Changes submitted via CTUF later than Oct. 30 are still welcome; they will be processed as received and changed in the schedule of classes as soon as possible. Students will be reminded to check the instruction modes

and schedules of their classes before they register, and again in the period before spring 2021 classes begin.

Work with your instructional personnel: pass/fail and student workload in AY 2020–21

As the provost [announced on Oct. 20](#), the campus is not repeating last spring's expansion of pass/fail options to cover almost every course in every major. The usual limitations on pass/fail credits for colleges, schools, and majors apply.

Some departments/programs have temporarily allowed for some expansion of pass/fail credit options within the major for fall 2020, as is their prerogative. These departments/programs will be responsible for making sure that these temporary expansions of pass/fail credit options are accurately represented as exceptions in students' degree audits.

Two changes in the pass/fail policy and procedures implemented last spring remain, however:

- Due to new requirements from the Colorado Department of Higher Education, the campus last spring developed [a new P+/P/F grade system for pass/fail courses](#), where a "P+" represents an underlying grade of C– or above, and a "P" represents a D+, D, or D–. This grading system continues this semester and beyond.
- The deadline to declare a class pass/fail has been permanently extended from the end of the third week of classes, to the end of the tenth week. This is the same as the deadline to withdraw from a class. This semester, that deadline is October 30 (prorated for shorter-term classes).

Many students have contacted the provost urging him to revisit the issue of pass/fail. As part of his [Oct. 20 e-memo](#), the provost explained the reasoning behind his decision not to extend the spring pass/fail provisions. He also urged all instructional personnel to help their students succeed in these times of unusual stress:

For all who are teaching this semester:

- *Please understand that many of our students are finding remote and online learning more difficult than traditional in-person learning. Build as much contact with students as possible into your remote and online courses.*
- *Remember that our students may be dealing with changes in their living situations, difficulty in internet access, or the needs of their own or their family's mental and physical health. Please be generous and compassionate about student requests for extending deadlines or taking make-up exams.*
- *Reach out to students who are struggling and respond promptly to students who seek your help. If you supervise teaching assistants, please mentor them in how to help students.*
- *Examine your syllabus and make adjustments if you have assigned more work than is typical for the course (homework, discussion posts, problem sets, etc.). Students are reporting to us that remote and online classes this semester are more assignment-heavy than the equivalent in-person courses.*
- *Make sure you return graded work promptly so your students are up to date about how well they're doing in your courses.*

- *If your pedagogy seems not to be reaching your students in the way you'd like, seek guidance from the [Center for Teaching and Learning](#). For the use of teaching technology, the Office of Information Technology has provided a variety of [instructor trainings and workshops](#).*

Tell your instructional personnel: flexibility on assignments during the week of fall break

Fall break begins November 26, Thanksgiving Day. After fall break, all teaching and exams for the rest of the semester will take place via distance (remote/online). Many students will travel home and stay there for the rest of the semester. Although the timing of check-out for students living in residence halls is still TBD, those students and others who live off campus may be leaving Boulder several days before fall break. Please be flexible on any assignment due dates during that week.

Tell your instructional personnel: scheduling and conducting fall 2020 final exams

Most of the usual principles apply for scheduling and conducting final exams this semester, but new instruction modes require some extra guidance. Please follow this guidance for final exams:

All classes

- Remember that all fall 2020 exams after fall break (November 26–27) must be administered remotely or online.
- All classes must follow the campus [Final Exam Policy](#) exam scheduling provisions:
 - For courses in sessions of ten weeks or longer, no examinations may be given during the week of classes preceding the start of the campus's final examination period; however, assignments listed in the syllabus such as papers, lab practicums, presentations, portfolios and projects may be due during that week.
 - Class sessions or graded assignments of any kind, including papers, lab practicums, presentations, portfolios and projects, may not take place or be due on a day designated in the academic calendar as a Reading Day. For fall 2020, Friday, Dec. 8 is designated as a Reading Day.
 - When students have three or more final examinations on the same day, they are entitled to arrange an alternative examination time for the last exam or exams scheduled on that day. When students have two final examinations scheduled to meet at the same time, they are entitled to arrange an alternative examination time for the course that meets later in the week during the term or, if the two courses meet on the same day during the term, the course that meets later in the day.

Online (asynchronous) classes

- Final exams for completely online (asynchronous) classes should be offered over a time window, inclusive of start and completion times, of at least 48 hours.

- Final exams for online (asynchronous) classes must be administered during the [final exam period \(December 9-13\)](#). They may be offered at any time during that period, as long as the administration time window of at least 48 hours begins and ends within that final exam period.
- An exception to the above two bullet points: some online classes are included on the [common exam schedule](#) for exams to be given at a specific time during the final exam period. For those teaching one of these courses, please communicate your expectations clearly to your students about whether their exam will be given during the established common exam time.

In-person and remote (synchronous) classes

- Final exams for all classes with remote (synchronous) and in-person components—including hybrid in-person/remote classes, hybrid in-person/online classes, and hybrid remote/online classes—should be administered one of two ways:
 1. During the [designated time for that class](#) during the [final exam period \(December 9–13\)](#). Instructors using this option should be aware that students may be living in many different time zones after fall break, and should be prepared to offer a makeup final exam or alternative assignment as necessary to accommodate those students.
 2. Within a time window of at least 24 hours, as long as that time window (a) includes the entirety of the [designated final exam time for that class](#) and (2) begins and ends within the [final exam period \(December 9-13\)](#).

Tell your instructional personnel: FCQs in fall 2020 and beyond

In spring and summer 2020, the university began using a new faculty course questionnaire (FCQ) question set that was developed and piloted in 2016–17 by the three-campus [FCQ Redesign Project](#). The provost [announced on Oct. 7](#) that this new question set will continue to be used in fall 2020 and hereafter.

In spring and summer 2020, due to the short timeline to implement the new question set, custom questions could not be included on the FCQ. In addition, results were not posted or made available to anyone but the course instructor. As of fall 2020, departments, programs, colleges and schools can request custom FCQ questions, as has been usual practice, and FCQ results will again be available to department leads and administrators and posted on the [FCQ Results page](#).

Many faculty and other instructional personnel are anxious about how FCQ results may be affected by the changes in teaching necessitated by COVID-19. The provost will be discussing this issue with chairs, directors and deans in the upcoming months to ensure that temporary dips in FCQ results are not viewed as a strike against an instructor (including GPTIs and TAs) when it comes to annual evaluations or future reviews for reappointment, tenure or promotion.

Tell your faculty, staff, and students: “snow days” before Thanksgiving break

Under extreme weather conditions, the Chancellor may decide to delay the opening of campus, close the campus early, or not open campus offices and departments, provided that essential services will be maintained. The decision is announced via [RAVE alert](#), email, and social media and posted on the university’s [main web page](#).

While the concept of a “snow day” seems a bit amorphous when many of us are teaching, learning, and working remotely, the Chancellor has decided to keep the inclement weather policy consistent with previous years as long as the campus is offering in-person classes along with remote, online, and hybrid classes. This policy will keep class attendance consistent for both faculty and students across their various instruction modes, and may also provide a welcome wellness break for students, faculty, and staff.

The administration is in the process of evaluating whether a “snow day” will change in nature when the campus is doing its teaching entirely remotely. Stay tuned for updates.

Up until the Thanksgiving holiday, this practice will be followed:

Classes

- In the event of a delay in opening campus, all in-person and remote classes with a start time that is during the closure period will be canceled. Online (asynchronous) classes, which have no set start time, are unaffected.
- In the event of a campus closure, all in-person, remote, and online classes will be canceled. This includes any hybrid combinations of in-person, remote, and online.

For employees working on campus or remotely

- Administrative leave is granted to regular employees for their scheduled work hours during the period of closure.
- Essential employees will work on campus as previously arranged with their supervisors.

For more information, see the [Inclement Weather Guidance](#) page.