

Academic Affairs Guidelines for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

Dear Faculty and Academic Staff –

Thank you for your patience as we continue to work toward the beginning of the new academic year. As we receive more guidance from the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH,) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC,) and the Arkansas Division of Higher Education (ADHE,) we will continue to refine our working documents and plans.

This document is to share information that we have at this time, specifically with regard to the academic calendar, instructional continuity, and student technology equity initiatives.

Please note that this week UCA will launch a newly designed COVID-19 website that will provide weekly updates from the working groups, as well as a compendium of resources, FAQs, links, campus communications, and guidance for our campus community and operations.

As always, please stay in contact with your department chair/school director and deans for information related to your specific disciplines, buildings, and departments. Communication is key. Thank you again for all you have done, and continue to do, in times of great challenge on many fronts.

- **COVID-19 WEBSITE AND UPDATED RESOURCES**
 - A newly-designed COVID-19 website will become available this week. This site will provide weekly updates from each of the working groups on campus, as well as serve as the official site for all FAQ's, documents, guidelines, and resources for campus. Please use this site and visit it regularly.

- **CALENDAR**
 - The Academic Calendar for 2020-2021 has been slightly adjusted to allow for a later start in January, thus extending the time away from campus during influenza season. The calendar is at the end of this document. Please note the following important dates:
 - Instruction will begin on August 20, 2020, and the academic calendar for fall 2020, including fall break, is **unchanged**. At this time, we hope to open campus with significant health and safety measures, including adequate testing, in place.
 - In order to slow the spread of COVID-19 and possibly influenza, students will not return to face-to-face instruction following the Thanksgiving break. All instruction after Thanksgiving break (4 days) and final exams will be held online as indicated in the final examination schedule. Therefore, even if we have not had to pivot to online instruction at any other point in the semester to accommodate an outbreak or in response

to ADH guidelines/directives, the final day for in-person instruction of the fall semester will be Tuesday, November 24. Student services, including housing and food service, **will still be in full operation** through the end of the semester.

- Spring Semester instruction will begin on **Tuesday, January 19, 2021**. This is the Tuesday after the observation of MLK Day.
- **INSTRUCTIONAL CONTINUITY**
 - There can be no plan for returning to instruction that does not include the capability to move online/to a virtual environment. This is the reality of the next academic year. [Please take full advantage of the resources – human and virtual – available to each of you through CTE as you plan for the fall.](#)
 - We know that, even in the most traditional face-to-face (f2f) settings, our instructional settings will look and feel very different. There are several groups and individuals working together to identify appropriate physical distancing, density in spaces, and alternative scheduling options and locations for classes. Working Group updates will be posted on the aforementioned COVID-19 website. Deans and department chairs are working with the Physical Distancing Working Group, the PPE Working Group, and one another to make plans for the variety of campus instructional spaces.
 - Colleges and departments are submitting plans for the various instructional approaches they will use this coming fall semester. Most courses are being designed as a hybrid model, minimizing the need for the full class to attend physically at the same time. We have also increased the number of fully-online sections. **Regardless of format, all classes must be designed to allow for remote or online attendance and instruction.**
 - **All faculty must host the basics in their courses' BlackBoard Shells.** Please see the CTE website for assistance and consult with our department chair regarding this.
 - Communicate often with your department chair/school director about your instructional plans and for guidance.
 - **A/B Schedule and Hybrid Courses**
 - A working group—led by Dr. Gary Bunn (COE), with members of faculty, Academic Council, IT, and CTE—is determining the efficacy of creating, at the institutional level, A/B designations for students for those enrolled in courses that will employ this model. A primary goal is clarity of messaging and scheduling. Please stay tuned as we explore options.

- **Attendance and Flexibility of Attendance Policies**
 - A group of faculty members, led by Dr. Jen Talbot (president, faculty senate) and Dr. Amy Hawkins, are starting work on best-practice guidelines for documenting attendance and engagement in an online setting. More information will be shared on the COVID-19 website as it becomes available.
 - As part of the “Stop the Spread” campaign, individuals will be strongly encouraged to STAY HOME if they are experiencing symptoms, and to get tested ASAP if symptoms persist. This includes you.
 - Anyone who has experienced close exposure to COVID-19 will be required to quarantine. Those who become ill will be required to isolate. This includes faculty and staff.
- **STUDENT ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY**
 - Clearly, the move to online in March exposed vast inequities of access to technology for our students. Addressing this is an ongoing priority for the University of Central Arkansas. Over 1,700 continuing students, all of whom were identified as having received Pell funds, received a \$400 CARES Act grant, with the hope these funds could be used to help meet technology needs. (Guidance was provided, and the funding amount was sufficient to purchase a laptop that would meet all needs for UCA software and systems, including testing requirements.) In addition, a laptop initiative for incoming freshmen without financial support for a laptop purchase is underway.

Academic Calendar – 2020-2021

FALL SEMESTER 2020 (17 weeks including finals week; 75 days including finals)

August 15-19, Sat. – Wed	Welcome Week
August 20, Thursday	Instruction begins - day and evening classes
September 7, Monday	Labor Day Holiday
October 15-18, Thur – Sun.	Fall Break
November 24, Tuesday	Last day of scheduled in-person instruction
November 25, Wednesday (open)	Thanksgiving Break (No classes. University offices open)
November 26-29, Thurs. – Sun.	Thanksgiving Holiday (University closed)
PLEASE NOTE: ALL CLASSES AND FINAL EXAMS WILL BE HELD VIRTUALLY FOLLOWING THE THANKSGIVING BREAK.	
December 4, Friday	Study Day
December 5, Saturday	Final Exams - Saturday classes

December 7-11, Mon – Fri

Final Examinations - day and night classes

December 12, Saturday

Winter Commencement

WINTER INTERSESSION

December 14, Monday

Instruction begins for Winter Intersession

December 25, Friday

Christmas Day – No classes

January 1, Friday

Final exams for Winter Intersession

SPRING SEMESTER 2021 (15 weeks including finals week; 73 days including finals)
(Original start date was January 13, Thursday. Loss of two days)

January 18, Monday

Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

January 19, Tuesday

Instruction begins - day and evening classes

March 21-28, Sun-Sun

Spring Break

April 30, Friday

Study Day

May 1, Saturday

Final exams – Saturday classes

May 3-7, Mon-Fri

Final exams – day and night classes

May 8, Saturday

Spring Commencement