

Academic Continuity Working Group

May 9, 2020

We determined that broad outreach, especially to students and the academic-focused areas of the campus community, was essential in order to evaluate various options for the 2020-21 academic year.

Questions for Listening Sessions and Student Survey

1. There are four aspects of the Working Group's thinking. Give us some feedback about each of them.
 - a. **Postponement in the College calendar:** What would it mean if we started the school year later than late August?
 - b. **Compression of contact hours:** If you had to cover your course content with the same number of contact hours, but over 7 or 9 weeks, what would be the challenges? How many courses could you cover in that time period?
 - c. **Layout of the academic year:** How important is it that you follow your curriculum in a particular sequence of courses? Can you think of courses that could be moved to either the beginning or the end of the academic year or to future years?
 - d. **Suitability for remote or hybrid learning:** Which courses are best suited for either entirely remote/online or a mid-semester conversion to remote/online?
2. What are the other factors we should consider as we plan for the next academic year?
3. What would make you feel safe?
4. What are your concerns for next year?
5. What are your hopes for the next year?
6. What resources and support would help you think creatively and proactively about how to effectively meet some of the challenges of next year?
7. Is there anything else we should know?

What We Heard

Safety

- Physical safety for everyone should be paramount

- Is the safety infrastructure that would be needed to be on campus even possible?
- An outbreak on campus would mean needing to quickly exit campus – again
- Returning to campus with the possible need to exit again would be a distraction at best, although it could allow for some classes to bond
- The College should consider protecting students' mental, not just physical, health
- The College is a safe haven for many students with challenging personal circumstances
- While the risk for most students is quite low, many faculty and staff (and a few students) are at, or care for people with, higher risk for medical complications should they contract the virus. These individuals are (rightly) very concerned about coming back to campus.

Remote Learning

Pro

- This is likely the safest way to start or conduct the fall semester
- Would allow the College to do what it does well: with enrollment caps, faculty could maintain their focus on small classes and individual attention
- 'Break out' sessions in Zoom are an effective method for supporting discussion and small class interaction
- Some academic departments have determined that, while not ideal, they are able to teach many classes effectively online

Con

- The value of a Swarthmore education is based largely on the close, personal interactions among members of the community with each other, in and outside the classroom
- An expressed interest from students to take a leave or gap year should fall classes exist solely online, and concern for the divisions that may form within class years as a result
- Numerous access/disparity concerns that could create or exacerbate tiers that already exist among students; for ex., inconsistent Internet access; differential access to materials students need (e.g., in music, students often don't own their own instruments)
- Classes, such as in the performing and studio arts, and labs that rely on collaboration and physical proximity would suffer
- Quality of student work will suffer without physical access to campus resources
- Some faculty and students will do "almost anything" to avoid more online teaching

- Some students have disabilities that make remote learning difficult if not impossible
- New colleagues would begin their Swarthmore career from a distance, without access to mentoring, etc.
- Lack of community and cohort formation among students, especially first-years
- Classtimes, time slots, “sacred time” would need to change to accommodate all students, regardless of time zones
- Concern for how classes with large enrollments would function online and the need for enrollment caps
- Fatigue, headaches
- Courses with community-based learning component will be affected
- If we are online, athletic teams will miss their seasons or have shortened seasons

Needed Resources

- Time: having as much notice as possible to plan for any scenario is essential
- More study-break periods
- Opportunities for recording lectures, time to adjust
- “Get to know us” sessions for students and faculty before classes begin, including over the summer
- Need for sourcing/providing high-quality online materials, including in translation
- More student TAs, which could provide employment for students who need to work while also alleviating some of the logistical burden for faculty teaching online
- Connect WAs more directly with classes rather than wait for students to reach out to them
- Support for CAPS to provide more resources/year-round support for students
- Does the current grading policy continue, knowing that in the fall, conditions that prompted the change will not have changed? (There are various opinions about this!)
- College-wide guidelines and protocols to establish standards and best practices for providing online instruction
- The need for more wellness resources for students

Hopes

- Model for students how to do well, build resilience; show them they will learn they can adjust
- Demonstrate the value we place on our enterprise by cutting tuition for an online-only approach; show our approach is not money driven but mission driven

- If we move to all-online, we must convey this is a stop-gap, temporary measure until in-person instruction may safely resume
- Any decision-making should focus more on what is good for the people at the College, less than on what is good for the elite vision of the College

Postponement of the College Calendar

Pro

- Time for faculty to prepare, for staff to adjust, for trainings
 - if we're going to level the playing field for less resourced students, we have more time to distribute equipment, etc., procuring learning resources,
 - time for students and faculty and staff to recover (a much needed break)
 - enough time to get a job or internship if necessary
 - for international students to get visas
- Probably least amount of time needed to teach online
- Safest option?
 - Provides best chance of having access/ability to have testing, treatment, vaccine, PPE
- Faculty and staff who have children get used to the “new normal” around family structures and elder care
- Acknowledges the profundity of the disruption; no one learns well when they are anxious. Allowing the space might allow us to make more progress, create more community
- Least disruptive to the curriculum; hierarchy of courses, structure of courses, etc. stays status quo
- Provides time to offer limited independent studies, project-based work, co-taught/multi-disciplinary classes and seminars; Arts faculty in particular are interested in developing some of these
- Can we divide the summer into two intensive sessions to preserve some time off for faculty/students/staff before the start of Fall 2021?

Con

- Students' academic/future plans will be delayed if classes are interrupted, esp. those who:
 - Have one semester left
 - Are international and need to return to the U.S.
 - Have summer/other plans for 2021, such as for jobs, internships, student teaching, etc.
 - Rely on student employment

- Have College health insurance (SHIP)
- Rely on federal education benefits
- Have a scholarship requirement to graduate by Spring 2021
- Have loans
- Hold visas
- Disruption of semester structure, graduation planning for seniors, sophomore planning
- Loss of or truncated sports season
- No one has Summer 2021 off = faculty research, facilities upgrades, internships suffer
- Impact on staff and adjunct faculty salaries
- Impact on students who cannot afford rent past August or who don't have a place to live in the fall

Compression of Contact Hours

Pro

- Maximal flexibility for scheduling, ability to pivot
- Would allow for fewer classes to be taken at the same time
- The start, stop, and break dates in the fall and perhaps after can be flexed within the current academic schedule to allow for more planning and prep time
- Sessions could be conducted online, in person, or both
- Courses could be split into back-to-back sessions if/as needed, such as for Honors seminars and capstones
- If a student or faculty member has to leave, they will not necessarily miss an entire semester's amount of work
- Honors could still function
- Faculty teaching two blocks, flexibility to distribute themselves over year
- Allows faculty time for research
- Students could focus on fewer classes at a time
- Pedagogical advantages, room for creative approaches
- Schedule allows for hands-on learning, things outside classroom
- If on campus, everyone on same class schedule (if on campus, classes could be scheduled at different times of the day)
- 3 hours of facetime each day
- Language instruction could be more immersive
- Room for field trips, project learning
- Allows time for transitions

- Could imagine hybrid model: allow on-campus experience with single rooms; while some students could be off-campus

Con

- If online, 3-hour block can be a challenge
- Rethinking of course structure necessary
- Class needs to be ready every day Mon-Wed, intense prep required
- Like having seminar every day
- Might be a challenge for arts courses
- Low feasibility; too difficult to organize logistically
- Logistical nightmare for Registrar, ITS
- More/as much time as possible needed to prepare/reconfigure/overhaul course material
- Redesigning courses is hard; some faculty don't see the point for all of the work it would require
- Would provide less time for students to process what they've learned and to acquire specific skills
 - Ex.s: dance, languages, creative writing, how to safely work in a chem lab; "time itself is part of the learning process"
- Some learning goals in some courses will not be met and may need to be removed
- Less time for student research projects and to access primary/secondary sources
- Shorter break(s), which could increase likeliness of fatigue and burnout for everyone
- If a student or faculty member has to leave for a period, they will have less time to make up what they miss because the time is so significant
- Re "academic progress" and federal requirements: usually a student must progress 6 credits per academic year to continue to be in good standing. If students receive only 2 credits per session, we would need to assess if they can continue given our current structure for eligibility
- The more drastic and complicated the change, the harder it is to understand and implement
- Once sequencing is changed for students, they can't easily "change back" in the future because they will lack necessary structures
- Parents of young children will have difficult time offering more contact hours, even if for fewer courses, in compressed amount of time
- Impact on managing activities outside of class, such as extracurriculars, jobs, volunteer work

Hopes

- Students expressed need for adjustment in course content, assignments, and expectations to match the altered schedule

Layout of the Academic Year

Pro

- Some students trusted that the college would figure out a way for them to get the pre-reqs they needed to get into the classes their majors required
- Some students felt that they have taken most of their intro courses this year and so would be ok if the sequence changed
- Varies by academic area; STEM areas and languages seem to be more rigid than the humanities in this regard

Con

- How to keep the honors major/minor if the sequence changes?
- Many students cited the hierarchical nature of STEM courses and how hard it is to not get lotteried already
- How to meet professional school requirements?
- Teacher certification seems difficult
- Engineering students were particularly worried about this
- How will QuestBridge students fare if they are not able to graduate in 8 semesters?
- Adjunct faculty and soon-to-be retirees, and their courses, are at risk if delays stretch into or beyond traditional fall/spring semester timeframes