

Professor Jean Morrison, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer

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TO: Academic Deans, Associate Deans, and Department Chairs

FROM: Jean Morrison, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer 

DATE: June 7, 2020

SUBJECT: Implementation of **Learn from Anywhere**

As you know, I recently shared [an update](#) with all Boston University faculty that announced, among other things, our adoption of **Learn from Anywhere** for undergraduate programs as well as most graduate and professional programs for the Fall 2020 semester. The discussion to adopt this blended modality of remote and in-person learning was done after consultation with the Council of Deans, as well as productive conversations that President Brown and I had with the Faculty Council and Undergraduate Department Chairs last month.

Now that the decision has been made to move forward with this approach, our attention must turn to the complex work of implementing this teaching approach for undergraduate and graduate programs. (This work has, of course, already begun for many programs.) There is no doubt that this implementation will have to happen on a local level; each department and program will face its own set of complex decisions and choices, and it is appropriate that the experts within each school and college have the authority to implement this modality in the way that makes the most sense for their area. However, it is also vital that we ensure that all programs abide by a common set of principles to provide a certain level of consistency across the university.

Therefore, I am asking that you ensure that all of your undergraduate and graduate programs use the following high-level guidelines:

- In-person classes are the default expectation as we seek to repopulate our residential campus. Any course that does not have a significant in-person component incrementally erodes the residential character of the BU experience. Thus, every effort should be made to avoid an excessive number of fully remote courses. Conditions for possible exceptions to this default expectation are discussed in the attached guidance document.
- Every class must be designed to also have remote components.
- Simultaneity of in-person and remote delivery is the strong default expectation. This ensures that individual students can shift between these modalities. Not all components of a course must be delivered live – some components may be delivered fully online,

asynchronously, or remote – but all courses should have a significant in-person component that is accessible synchronously to remote students.

Our general expectation is that all undergraduate and graduate courses will comply with these guidelines, but we recognize that there may be cases where there is a compelling reason for an individual course to be delivered using a different model. These exceptions should be few, and must be approved by the dean of the school or college. I ask that deans review exception requests rigorously, weighing the request against the more general need to maintain a residential program. If you believe there is a compelling reason that an entire program cannot or should not meet these guidelines of dual modality, please contact me directly to discuss how to proceed.

Finally, I know that many people are wondering about how physical distancing requirements will impact classroom layout, capacity, and scheduling for the fall. As we discussed at the last Council of Deans meeting, there is a group currently working to calculate the capacity of all teaching spaces at Boston University and modeling how many classes can remain in their current space and how many may need an alternative space. Once this analysis is complete, it will be shared directly with the schools and colleges. Faculty and staff do not need to measure classrooms or try to calculate room capacities. We will make this information available as soon as possible and will be prepared to work with your teams to plan and implement any required classroom or schedule changes.

These guidelines are outlined in more detail in the attached implementation guidance document, which is also [available online](#) and may be shared with any faculty or staff.

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Guidance for Learn *from* Anywhere (LfA) June 2020

Definition

For the Fall 2020 semester, Boston University will offer undergraduate and most graduate and professional programs through a blended modality of remote and in-person learning known as **Learn *from* Anywhere (LfA)**. This new modality will enable students to participate in the classroom, or remotely, when necessary.

Goals

The **LfA** model has six main goals:

- To enable the University to provide the residential education that students and families value and to which BU is committed as a matter of pedagogical principle.
- To enable us to comply with expected public health guidelines by de-densifying our classroom, studio, and lab spaces, while still allowing for face-to-face learning.
- To accommodate COVID-19 related needs of individual students, faculty, and staff, as appropriate.
- To enable the University to accommodate international students who, due to visa challenges or travel restrictions, cannot arrive in Boston in a timely fashion.
- To enable us to pivot quickly and smoothly to fully remote learning, should the public-health situation deteriorate to an extent that such a move is required.
- To encourage student satisfaction and retention by keeping students' registered schedules intact for Fall 2020.

Guidelines and Recommendations

LfA is a framework that can guide schools/colleges, and the departments and programs within them, in decision-making around classroom space, course design and how to best address the space and pedagogical needs of individual courses, majors, and programs.

- In-person classes are the default expectation as we seek to repopulate our residential campus. Any course that does not have a significant in-person component incrementally erodes the residential character of the BU experience. Thus, every effort should be made to avoid an excessive number of fully remote courses. Conditions for possible exceptions to this expectation are discussed below.

- Every class must also have significant remote components, which will work in two ways: (1) as a “pressure release valve” that contributes to de-densification through a planned and managed shift of some students in a course, some of the time, to the remote modality; and (2) as a “redundant system” that provides flexibility for the institution to pivot to fully remote classes if needed and also flexibility for individuals to continue teaching/taking a class if they cannot be physically present. Examples of remote components would include readings posted to Blackboard (online), recorded lectures (online, asynchronous), Blackboard discussion forums (online, asynchronous), quizzes on Blackboard, or office hours in Zoom (remote, synchronous). In general, these remote components should be sufficient to allow students to complete the course fully remotely, if necessary. However, the University also recognizes that in some instances, remote participation only may not be sufficient for students to fulfill a course’s core learning outcomes. See the sections on exceptions below for additional discussion.
- Simultaneity of in-person and remote delivery is the strong default expectation. This ensures that individual students can shift between these modalities. Not all components of a course must be offered live – some components may be delivered fully online, asynchronously, or remote – but all courses should have a significant in-person component that is accessible synchronously to remote students.

Strategies for De-Densifying

There are two principal strategies for de-densifying classes:

- Alternating in-person attendance through rotations
- Utilizing fully remote components

In a rotation system, students in a class are divided into two or more groups (based on class size and room capacity) that rotate between in-person and remote attendance. This should be the default strategy because it ensures that even though every student cannot attend every class, they have the opportunity to experience all aspects of a class face-to-face. In some situations, however, a rotation system will be impractical, either because the ratio of enrollments to room capacity would require too many groups to rotate effectively, or because certain aspects of a class can be more effectively undertaken remotely and other elements can be more effectively delivered in-person. In these cases, courses could be divided into fully remote and face-to-face components.

Decisions about specific implementations of these strategies must be the purview of individual academic units and instructors working within room capacity constraints communicated to them by the University. This is because the nature of individual courses and small perturbations in conditions may require significant shifts in course pedagogy and structure.

Note: At this time, individual academic units should not adjust their classroom assignments to de-densify. While academic units may make changes to a course that do not affect other aspects of the class schedule (e.g., cancellation, updating the instructor of record, adding class

comments, adding directed studies sections), they should not make the following changes without coordinating centrally to achieve an optimal utilization of all teaching spaces:

- Adding a class
- Raising the enrollment limit of a class to warrant a room change
- Cross listing classes currently on the schedule, or removing a cross listing
- Changing the meeting pattern of a class
- Requesting classroom swaps

Implementation

In implementing **LfA**, the University will provide support for faculty and students and will have processes in place for reviewing requests for exceptions to the default model.

Support for Faculty and Teaching Fellows

The transition to **LfA** for the Fall 2020 semester needs to take place over the summer of 2020. The University is already adding appropriate technology to virtually all classrooms and will provide multiple resources for faculty and teaching fellows to enable and facilitate this transition. These resources will be housed within the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and will include guidance on pedagogical frameworks, suggestions for fostering community in remote environments, and effective practices for content delivery, learning activities, and assessment. Discussion forums and materials that focus on tools and technology will also be made available.

For certain classes, additional teaching assistants or course assistants will be available to support the technologies being used. An important reason for the provision of additional support is to ensure that teaching fellows—except on rare occasion with approval from the dean—do not work more than 20 hours per week.

Support for Students

To be positioned for success, students will need access to an appropriate laptop or other devices and an orientation to **LfA** so they understand the context of their education. Since **LfA** will be implemented differently in different classes, instructors should spend time at the beginning of the semester outlining expectations for technology, attendance and participation, and behavior and academic integrity in the remote learning environment. Resources and workshops on learning in the **LfA** modality will be available to students through the Educational Resource Center.

*Exceptions to the **LfA** Model*

LfA is, again, the default expectation for *all* courses. Exceptions should be few and approved by school/college deans.

We envision three categories of possible exception to the in-person requirement.

- First, it may be necessary to allow some limited number of courses to be taught fully remotely for a variety of reasons.
- Second, there may be courses that can be offered more effectively in a fully remote, rather than simultaneously in-person and remote, fashion. Such appeals, however, would need to be balanced against the broader need for most courses to be offered within the **LfA** framework.
- Third, when courses are offered with multiple sections, discussions, or labs, it may be desirable to offer some small number of these sections, discussions, or labs fully remotely, either to accommodate the safety needs of faculty and/or teaching fellows or to provide increased student choice.

There may be rare exceptions to the expectation that it should be feasible for students to complete a course fully remotely. (An example of such a situation would be an advanced lab course in which developing manual proficiency in a technical skill is a core learning outcome.) In these situations, schools/colleges and departments/programs should ensure that students are informed about the need for in-person attendance and engagement as soon as possible, and they should work flexibly and creatively to accommodate students in such courses. Students who begin a course in residence should be afforded a reasonable pathway toward its completion, should they or the University be required to pivot to fully remote engagement. Students who cannot begin the semester on campus should be discouraged from enrolling in courses for which in-person attendance is an *absolute requirement*. In such instances, schools/colleges and departments/programs should do their utmost to identify alternative courses or pathways that allow such students to continue their progress to degree.

Requests for exceptions to **LfA** (i.e., requests to offer a course without residential components or without remote components) should be submitted by programs/departments (not individual faculty) to the appropriate school/college dean. Deans should review exception requests rigorously, weighing the specific needs motivating the request against the more general need to maintain a residential curriculum. Approved exceptions should be shared with Interim Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs Sue Kennedy (for undergraduate courses) and Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs Daniel Kleinman (for graduate and professional courses) for central coordination of space needs and visa requirements of international students.

The Experience of Individual Students

If exceptions to the core requirements of **LfA** are rare, the schedules of most students should intrinsically have an ample in-person dimension. The schedules of international students should be explicitly monitored by the schools and colleges to ensure that they are compliant with the requirements of these students' visas. Advisors should work with students who have a particular need for remote accommodations to ensure that they have access to an appropriately robust program of study.

Types of Courses that May be Challenging to Offer within the LfA Framework

The LfA framework should be straightforward for two types of classes: independent classes of moderate size and lectures with discussions. The LfA framework will pose more challenges to other course types, especially labs. Labs, by their nature, involve students working together in close proximity to perform physical manipulations, not only to acquire content knowledge but also to develop technical skills that require practice.

Possible strategies for realizing the goals of LfA in lab courses include:

- Rotations
- De-densifying by restricting enrollments to priority students (e.g., seniors who require a lab for the major)
- Reorganizing syllabi so that activities requiring students' physical presence are deferred until later in the Fall 2020 semester
- Offering some sections fully remotely in multi-section lab courses, preferably with an in-person component being provided by the pre-lab discussion
- Postponing lab courses that need not be taught in Fall 2020 until the spring semester (both to release lab spaces for other classes and to allow those postponed labs to be taught in the traditional fashion in the spring)

Sensitive Subjects in Remote Teaching

Our default expectation is that courses with significant numbers of international students who are not able to be in Boston in-person will be recorded so that these students may "attend class" at a time that fits the time zone in which they live. However, many of our courses deal with sensitive subjects like politics, class, race, and sexuality, and recording courses could put some students from authoritarian countries at risk or make faculty uncomfortable. In these cases, we will leave it to the discretion of the professor to determine the appropriateness of recording.