

Dear GCU students and families,

As our preparations for the 2020-21 academic year continue, we want to provide some updates on how those plans are progressing as they relate to nine areas: 1) classroom instruction, 2) post-Thanksgiving instruction, 3) residence halls, 4) large gatherings, 5) face masks, 6) the Move-In process, 7) campus dining, 8) coronavirus testing, and 9) health/safety accommodations.

Our intent is to provide as much information as possible as these plans unfold so that students and families can be comfortable in their decisions as they relate to their personal circumstances. To help in the timing of those decisions, GCU is extending the housing cancellation fee effective date from July 1 to August 1. Students in most academic programs also have the option to take classes completely online for the fall semester or even the entire 2020-21 academic year. Because of GCU's expertise and experience in online education, as well as our faculty's unparalleled commitment to students' success, there is a lot of built-in flexibility to ensure students can continue to progress in their academic journey no matter the learning modality.

As an example, [this article](#) highlights students' academic achievements as the University was forced to transition to an online learning platform for the final four weeks of the spring semester. Two significant measurements captured our students' dedication to their academic endeavors as well as the support they received from their faculty:

- Students' course completion success rate, already at 88.9% in the Spring of 2019, actually increased to 89.8% in the Spring of 2020 as they pivoted to an online learning modality. What makes that latter number so impressive is that, because of GCU's online capabilities, it decided to keep its grading system in place rather than go to a pass/fail system, which means students continued to earn their stellar grades when applying for graduate school.
- In students' end-of-course surveys following the spring semester, they gave their professors more high marks than at the same time last year – 86.1% in 2020 compared to 85.5% the previous year.

We have great optimism that, as we make COVID-related adjustments for the fall semester, the strength of the GCU community will again shine and prevail.

The following health and safety protocols will be accelerated or decelerated based upon the health conditions at the time in accordance with guidance from public health and government authorities. But, as of today, these are some of the plans we're preparing to implement.

Classroom instruction

GCU is incorporating a blended learning model in which most classrooms will be at 40-50% capacity to create appropriate physical distancing and lessen the risks of infection for students and faculty. This can be achieved by incorporating a blend of learning modalities in which students will be assigned to receive in-class instruction from their faculty member one day per week, accompanied by a second day of synchronous learning that will occur remotely through LoudCloud, GCU's robust learning management system. For example, in a Tue/Thu class, a student may be assigned a classroom setting on Tuesday,

then will sign in to LoudCloud during the same time slot on Thursday. Additional learning will occur through other technologies that faculty will assign based on those specific course outcomes.

Courses will maintain the same curriculum, the same continuity of instruction and learning, and the same educational outcomes. To ensure that all classes receive the same amount of in-person instruction from their professors, most classes will be scheduled for Tue/Thu, Wed/Fri, or Monday time slots. Students' class schedules will be updated no later than Aug. 1 to reflect these changes.

For other courses that require more hands-on work in a laboratory environment, safe environments will be created to ensure that the coursework can be completed and all learning outcomes are achieved. Those requirements and instructional times are specific to each college. More information regarding these courses will be forthcoming from the dean of each college.

Students in most programs also have the option to take their entire coursework in an online modality for the fall semester or even the entire 2020-21 academic year. Exceptions are nursing and other laboratory-intensive programs due to the hands-on nature of those programs. For students who choose an online modality in the fall, it is highly likely we will still be able to provide housing for them in the spring semester.

Post-Thanksgiving instruction

After the Thanksgiving holiday break, face-to-face instruction will cease for the final 8 days of the semester and switch to an online modality for the vast majority of students. Students have the option of staying home and finishing the coursework online or returning to campus to live in their residence hall while finishing classes in an online format. Dining options will remain open during this time for students who remain on campus.

For some students, due to the nature of their academic program, they will need to return to campus after Thanksgiving for the final 8 days of instruction. Those students will be notified by the start of the academic year.

This post-Thanksgiving policy helps prevent the possible spread of COVID-19 from students who will travel during the holiday break, reduces population density on campus during the onset of flu season and a potential second wave of the coronavirus, and saves students on travel costs to and from the university during the final two weeks of the semester.

Any unused Dining Dollars will roll over to the spring semester. Because there are only 8 days of instruction remaining in the semester and because students have the choice of returning to campus, there will be no housing refunds for those 8 days. GCU will also honor the full amounts of scholarships related to on-campus housing if students choose to remain home after Thanksgiving.

Students who choose to remain home after Thanksgiving can leave their personal belongings in their residence hall for when they return in January.

Other holidays

For other holidays such as Labor Day, students are highly encouraged to remain on campus and enjoy time with their friends rather than travel to their homes or other destinations. Reduced travel helps limit the spread of the virus and better ensures the safety of the GCU community.

Residence halls

GCU is not considering changing the start date of the fall semester, so the housing selection process is proceeding. Residence hall living will be very typical, although physical distancing protocols will likely be incorporated in community areas such as lobbies, laundry areas, elevators, etc. There may also be some level of restrictions with outside visitors to protect students who are living in the residence, depending on the conditions in the fall.

Because GCU is fortunate to have the vast majority of its buildings built within the last 10 years, our heating ventilations and air conditioning (HVAC) systems meet modern standards for fresh air intake, filtration and circulation. We reviewed those setups to ensure we don't have air circulation patterns that exacerbate virus spread. For the few older buildings on campus, we have adapted or are in the process of adapting the HVAC systems to allow greater fresh air intake and again will ensure air circulation patterns don't aid in the spread of any virus.

Large and small gatherings

Gatherings such as Chapel, athletic contests, Welcome Week activities and social events such as Lope-a-palooza, Midnight Madness, Mr. GCU, Lip Sync, etc., are a hallmark of the GCU experience.

Depending on guidelines at the time from the CDC, Arizona health authorities and the NCAA, those may be adjusted as necessary to reduce population density and ensure the health and safety of our campus community. Physical distancing and mask wearing could be components of events or spaces in which there are dense populations. Events may also be spread out over multiple venues, be held in outdoor settings or postponed until spring. For example, to create physical distancing, Chapel services may be spread out among several locations such as the GCU Arena, Antelope Gym, Canyon Activities Center and outdoor venues once the weather cools off.

Smaller gatherings such as Life group sessions, club activities and outreach opportunities may be limited to 10 people or fewer while adhering to health guidelines in existence at the time such as face masks and physical distancing.

Face masks

There is now much research that indicates the use of cloth face masks contributes greatly to reducing the spread of the virus. As the number of coronavirus cases in Arizona continues to increase daily, both Maricopa County and the City of Phoenix recently voted to join many other Arizona cities and mandate that masks be worn in public. We are adhering to those guidelines by requiring masks to be worn in classrooms, restaurants and other indoor community spaces as well as outdoor settings where physical distancing of at least six feet is not possible. This includes common spaces such as elevators, lobbies, restrooms, meeting rooms, laundry rooms and crowded walkways. Students may remove face coverings within their dorm rooms.

We will continue to evaluate those requirements as we get closer to the fall semester. Masks will be provided for every GCU student.

Move-In

Move-in during Welcome Week marks an exciting and important moment for resident students at GCU. To honor this tradition but still adhere to physical distancing requirements, we will institute an Appointment Move-In process and offer the availability of small volunteer teams. After July 1, students with a booking can select a time slot to move into their hall or apartment. Residents will be sent instructions to their GCU email address on how and when to select their Move-In appointment. Upon arrival, new students will be greeted by a team of 2-3 Student Leaders who will show new residents to their room and help them check in. Per the family's preference, this team is also available to assist with unloading the vehicle and taking the student's belongings to their room.

Students should limit the number of people accompanying them for Move-In, especially if they have family members who are more at-risk to COVID-19, since we will be hosting people from all over the country that week. Those family members may also be required to wear a face mask per guidelines by the City of Phoenix and local health authorities.

Campus dining

Our Food Services team is streamlining operations to serve students in a safe and sanitary manner and taking every precaution for the fall. In order to comply with city health regulations, this will include offering only take-out meals that students can either eat in an outdoor setting with fellow students or take back to their rooms. Outdoor seating in shady areas will be added in many campus locations. Food Services will follow every guidance from the CDC and/or state and federal authorities.

The same food options will be available with an increase of grab-and-go options at most locations in order to compensate for physical distancing and to keep lines at a minimum. Also, our grocery store and convenience stores will have increased grab-and-go options and offer greater selections.

Indoor areas such as the Student Union will be open as a study area or place to congregate if students are wearing masks and practicing physical distancing, but indoor dining will not be permitted.

These regulations will be re-evaluated and adjusted based on the COVID-19 health regulations in the fall.

Coronavirus testing

Student-athletes and student leaders who arrive in advance of Welcome Week will be tested for the coronavirus, as it is likely they will be in closer contact during training sessions and other activities. Once the academic year begins, tests will also be made widely available for all students who voluntarily wish to be tested.

Students who are symptomatic will be tested immediately. If a student does test positive, contact tracing will occur and any students who have come in contact with the infected individual will also be tested. Affected individuals will be placed in quarantine or isolation and cared for, while accommodations will be made to continue their classroom instruction.

If a cluster of positive results is identified, we will do extensive testing in those areas.

Safety accommodations/GCU Hotel

GCU's residence halls are expected to be at capacity. As such, the University has made the decision to close GCU Hotel effective July 1 so that it can be used as a facility in which to isolate or quarantine individuals who become ill and provide health care and food services for them. Registered nurses will provide care for students in quarantine.

Students who have tested positive or have been in close contact with an individual who tests positive will be quarantined at the hotel, with blocks of rooms separating those who are positive from others who are quarantined as a precaution. Extreme sanitation protocols will also be in place.

If the hotel reaches capacity, the University has a number of other locations that can be used to safely house students.

Families who have made reservations at GCU Hotel during the fall will be contacted and provided with names of nearby hotels as possible alternate accommodations.

In closing

We learn more about the impact of COVID-19 every day and will know even more in the coming weeks. We also know there will be some level of risk and it is inevitable that some students will come in contact with the virus. We intend to mitigate those threats to the extent we can by layering the above strategies along with frequent handwashing, increased sanitization protocols and physical distancing. Within those guidelines, we hope to maintain the same culture and community atmosphere that GCU is known for.

We have heard from many families in the GCU community asking us to take every precaution to protect their son or daughter. Others, particularly as it relates to face coverings, would prefer we let individuals have the freedom to make those choices. That's just a reflection of the society in which we live. Given the dense population that exists on a college campus, we're asking everyone to come together for the greater good of the GCU community that also includes older faculty and staff members who are in a higher-risk category for COVID-19. Working together with grace and compassion for your fellow students and faculty, we will strive to show that the heart and resiliency of the GCU community is far more powerful than any pandemic.

Students will soon receive a Campus Policy Acknowledgment and Pledge form that must be signed by Aug. 1. The form will be located in your student portal where it can be signed electronically. It is also viewable [here](#).

If you have further questions, please contact your counselor. FAQs will also be updated regularly on our [COVID-19 web page](#) as we get closer to the fall semester.