

Memo



COVID Memo #6: Summer School

For several weeks, the DTU has been asking the College for its position on whether Summer School will be offered. As we mentioned in more than one of our memos, the College has consistently responded that it was reflecting on the question. Based on feedback received from members, including the DTU Executive Council, we took a position that the College should consider scaling down its offerings in order to ensure quality while meeting the needs of Dawson students who are relying on summer school in order to graduate as well as our non-permanent teachers who rely on summer school for remuneration.

At a meeting held yesterday with the administration, we were provided with the College's plans for summer school. We were caught off guard by what appears to be a plan that ignores many very legitimate concerns regarding pedagogy, academic integrity, and working conditions. Rather than focusing on allowing students who are missing just one or two courses to graduate, the College is planning for approximately 2,700 seats for Summer School despite its own estimate that there are only 600 students who require three or less courses to graduate. There has been almost no alteration from the pre-COVID plan for Summer School despite the significant changes to the teaching and learning environment.

We understand that at the moment you may prefer to focus your energies on your current students and your online courses, but we believe a consultation of teachers must take place. We are concerned that the decisions are being driven by the Registrar's office and the Continuing Education Department, motivated by registration numbers and generating revenue, with a lack of consideration for the pedagogical quality of the course offerings.

This lack of concern for pedagogy is evidenced by the absence of consultation with departments, whose responsibility it is to ensure the quality of courses. In particular, there are several courses that contain elements that are impossible to deliver in an online format, notably practical and laboratory competencies. When asked how teachers are expected to proceed with these types of courses, the College responded that since teachers are already doing it this semester they should be capable of doing it again. Such a response overlooks the very important fact that the semester was half completed when we were forced to move online, allowing for teachers to attest, albeit not perfectly, to the attainment of competencies that require physical presence on campus. Indeed, even when departments have taken firm positions against offering entire courses online, as with French intensives, the College has ignored that position and scheduled the courses regardless.

Moreover, several departments have taken the position that it is impossible to validate the level of competency attained and thus it is impossible to provide a numerical grade for the Winter semester. Questions regarding the feasibility of conducting evaluations and assessments online - notably to do with issues of Academic Integrity - remain unanswered for online summer courses. Indeed, even institutions that are more established in online learning, such as Cégep à Distance, seem to acknowledge these challenges and use in-person evaluations. Given the current public health situation, such a hybrid model would not be possible.

It is important that departments begin (or continue) to discuss what is pedagogically feasible in the summer. The College has already decided that Remedial Activities courses in English or French will not be offered online; it is possible that other such courses might be equally unfeasible in an online format. Below you will find a list of questions that we hope departments can address in their discussions. If this has not already been done, we ask that departments take positions on these, and any other pertinent issues concerning summer school. Coordinators should forward the positions to the sector Dean, the Academic Dean, and the DTU. **Once we have your feedback we will be able to advocate for a summer school that is realistic and that accomplishes the goal of providing an education to our students, rather than simply giving them a credit to graduate.**

Questions requiring a departmental positions:

1. Which of your summer courses can be offered entirely online without compromising any of the competencies?
2. For the courses that can be offered entirely online, will it be feasible to assign a numerical grade that assesses the level of attainment of the competencies?
3. Which of your summer courses cannot be offered entirely online because of the impossibility to address some of the competencies through distance learning?
4. In terms of pedagogy, what elements of the course cannot be delivered in an online format?

Food for thought for your discussions:

- Does the intensive format of summer school pose additional problems when a course is offered entirely online?
- Should the College limit enrolment to summer school to students who require a few courses to graduate?
- Which of the courses offered by your department are typically courses that students require to graduate?
- Can academic integrity be maintained without in-person assessments?

- Would an EQ/IN grading scheme allow for certain courses to be offered that could not otherwise be offered?
- For those courses that could be taught online, what would be a reasonable number of students per section?
- What proportion of those courses that could be taught online should be delivered synchronously?
- In the event that the College is unable to staff all of its summer courses would your department be in favour of allowing a newly-hired teacher to undertake teaching an online course? If so, under what conditions?
- What would be reasonable working conditions for an online course? e.g. the number of students, the expected amount of preparation, the number of required contact hours.

Finally, we are also concerned with making sure that our teachers are properly equipped to offer online courses, especially given that these courses are hourly-paid. Attempting to transition an entire course online, on such short notice, paid on an hourly basis, is an unfair and unrealistic task for many of our teachers. **Our Continuing Education teachers must be supported - many of them are currently teaching and will be expected to develop an entirely online course in a matter of weeks, while managing family responsibilities.** Working conditions for Continuing Education teachers are already deplorable: the prospect of forcing them into a summer semester under these circumstances without any additional remuneration, seems unreasonable.