



To: All Faculty
From: Diane Gauvin, Academic Dean
Date: June 1, 2020
Subject: **Preparation for the summer and fall semesters**

Dear Faculty,

As June begins, I would like to thank you once again for your flexibility and prodigious efforts in making possible the successful completion of this extraordinary semester.

I know how much stress you have been under and I imagine that you would like nothing more than to relax. In a few short weeks, I hope you will be able to do exactly that, to take the time to rest and regain your strength and energy.

Before you embark on that restorative process, I invite you to take stock of what we have learned about students' experiences since the College was required to deliver instruction online, and what steps the College is taking to make improvements.

Survey of students' online experiences

In late April and early May, the Quality Assurance and Planning Office, working in collaboration with the Academic Dean's Office, ran a survey of students to get a better understanding of how they were coping with online instruction. Out of 10,010 eligible students, 4,347 participated in the survey. Among the quantitative findings, approximately half the students surveyed had difficulty participating in online courses, the chief reasons being internet connection problems, not having a quiet space at home, or having to share a computer with other family members. Notwithstanding the best efforts of teachers to master new technologies and grapple with teaching in an unfamiliar virtual environment – a situation which students understood and appreciated – many students clearly found that environment difficult and stressful.

Just over half the students indicated that the amount of work for online courses is more, or a lot more, than before the College shutdown. Over 1400 students responded to the open question about what the college could do to improve their online experience. When those comments were broken down by theme, they showed that students had some major preoccupations with (in descending order of importance) workload, grading/exams/assessments, course delivery/instructional methods, and platforms/conferencing software/portal. Please refer to the [Hub](#) for further information and the detailed results from this important survey.

As we move forward to the summer and fall semesters, learning from the students' feedback and finding ways to improve the student experience will be matters of key importance. Unlike the winter semester, where eight weeks of physical presence helped to build relationships, community and awareness, the two approaching semesters will not afford a similar classroom foundation. Furthermore, in August, Dawson will be welcoming over 3000 new students who will have little or no knowledge of the college.

Support for students

An inter-college committee, comprising representatives from the academic skills centres of the English colleges and coordinated by Dawson's Ania Marczevska, has been established to prepare resources for students to better equip them for learning online. This committee will help ensure that new students have the means to integrate into virtual college life. Some tools will be developed in traditional areas, such as study skills, but other tools will address what students need to know about using online technology and what is appropriate online behaviour. Most importantly, the committee will create resources to help students build resilience and sustain their motivation when learning online.

Support for teachers

The Faculty Hub is developing resources to help teachers rethink and realign their courses, taking into account that all, or nearly all, learning activities must take place online. Through webinars, tutorials, curated resources and one-on-one support mechanisms, the pedagogical counsellors in the Hub, in collaboration with the communities of practice, can support teachers in the different ways of designing courses, engaging students and conducting assessments. One such resource – an asynchronous, self-paced course on [Teaching with Moodle](#) – was launched a few days ago and all teachers are welcome to follow the whole course, or only those parts that interest them.

Performa, in addition to its usual offerings as part of the Master Teacher Program, has created a six-hour non-credit workshop on [Developing Digital Competencies](#). This workshop will help support teachers in planning and delivering online activities. Teachers can choose the cohort that is best suited to their field.

Measures being taken by the College

The Director General formed a task force to provide advice to the College on the measures that are essential for completing the winter semester and for undertaking the summer and fall semesters with a limited physical presence on the campus. Led by Carmela Gumelli and working within the guidelines established by the Direction régionale de santé publique de Montréal (DRSP), the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST), and the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ), the task force prepared a protocol to address the following matters:

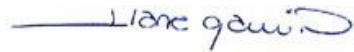
- the gradual reintegration of certain activities at the college;
- the distribution of computer equipment to students and employees;
- access to academic materials (textbooks and coursepacks) and library resources; and
- academic and psycho-social support for students.

Notwithstanding the Ministry's recent announcement stating that in-person learning activities involving at least 30% of students can take place, the College must continue planning a fall semester that is mostly online. Given the tight physical spaces in the college building, the numerous DRSP requirements including two-metre distancing between individuals, as well as the broader health issues in the Montreal area, it is logistically impossible to meet the 30% threshold for student presence. The College, however, is exploring ways to bring students onto the campus so that they reduce their sense of isolation by building connections with other students and their teachers, and forging a sense of belonging within the college.

To facilitate the adjustment of teachers and students alike to a semester-long online environment, the College has revised the fall academic calendar. The fall semester will begin later than usual – on August 31 – to give teachers extra time to prepare their courses, share information with one another and draw on the expertise of the Hub. The delayed start of classes will also allow more flexibility for organizing welcoming and support activities for students. In addition, and exceptionally, there will be a study break during the second week of October. This break will provide an opportunity to assess how teaching and learning are going and allow teachers and students to seek support if necessary.

These measures only partially address the enormous challenge of how to engage, stimulate and challenge students, and strive to maintain the level of instruction for which Dawson is known. Everything Dawson does to shepherd students through their education, from orientation and Welcome Week to convocation, must be reimagined and recreated so that students can truly participate in a Dawson community, and benefit from and value their time at Dawson. We must continue to be creative in the ways we support our students – all our students – so that they are engaged in their studies and remain motivated to complete them.

Thank you for your understanding, unwavering commitment and continuous efforts during these exceptional circumstances.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diane Gauvin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending to the left of the first letter.

Diane Gauvin