

Fordham's Academic Approach in 2020-2021

Beginning April 20, Fordham inaugurated a process of planning for the continuity and resilience of the University's academic enterprise in the year ahead. Numerous faculty members, administrators, staff members, and especially students contributed their insights and feedback. An Academic Review Team consisting of faculty leaders and key academic administrators made recommendations to the deans, members of the President's Cabinet, and Father McShane. This document outlines the model for Fordham's academic programs that emerged out of the consensus of the University's leadership.

Our Foundational Commitment

Fordham will be fully in session throughout the academic year 2020-2021. To the greatest extent that the public health situation permits, we seek to teach our students in person and on campus. However, if on-campus operations are disrupted by the pandemic, our fundamental commitment is to continue providing an outstanding, transformative Jesuit education without interruption and without any sacrifice of quality.

Academic Calendar

Students, faculty, and administrative leaders all broadly cautioned against major changes to the academic calendar, especially when the course of the COVID-19 pandemic is uncertain and unpredictable. Students especially encouraged us to retain the traditional rhythm of the year as much as possible, both to maximize the opportunity for in-person learning and to enable end-of-semester exams and projects to take place on campus if possible. Therefore, the first day of Fall semester classes for all undergraduate programs and the majority of graduate programs remains August 26, 2020. We will also make it easier for students who wish to begin their Fordham studies in January 2021 to do so. Please consult each school's academic calendar for further details.

Summer Sessions 2020 & 2021

Learning during the summer has been very popular among our students this year. In the coming months, all courses during Summer Sessions I and III will be taught online. During Summer Session II, we are offering a mix of online and on-ground courses, subject to the impact of COVID-19 in NYC through July and August. We plan to offer an extended set of summer courses in 2021, which will also enable those students who join us in January 2021 to catch up. Summer Session 2021 will also feature more robust programming for co-curricular activity and community engagement.

Flexible Hybrid Learning Environment

The most noticeable changes next year will come in the arena of instructional delivery. Nearly every course at Fordham will adopt what we are calling a flexible hybrid learning environment. This means that amenable course elements (such as those that primarily involve the presentation of ideas or independent learning) will be designed ahead of time and delivered asynchronously, for students to access them as their schedules allow. Interactive components, such as discussions and small group meetings, will take place synchronously and will be taught in intensive, personalized ways. Some departments have already begun to lay plans for developing the asynchronous portions of multi-section courses collaboratively, so that students enrolled in all sections of these courses will benefit from high-quality, team-taught content.

Fordham will provide substantially expanded pedagogical and technical support to all who teach. Because creating videos and presentations, designing digital interactive experiences, and moderating online discussions are unfamiliar practices for many instructors, it is Fordham's commitment that faculty will not be alone in adapting these and other forms of pedagogy to meet the needs of our students and embody the values of Jesuit higher education.

Why has Fordham opted for this style of instruction? We believe that, intrinsically, there are benefits to methods of teaching and learning that prioritize interaction and enable students to work through lectures and other forms of knowledge acquisition on their own time. The complications of COVID-19, however, offer two additional compelling reasons:

Limited Classroom Capacity

When we return to campus, public health regulations will almost certainly require us to reduce seating capacity in all of our classrooms. The flexible hybrid learning environment that we have adopted will enable an instructor, for instance, to divide the scheduled class time per week into two or more time slots and meet with smaller groups of students weekly in the various time slots. Complementary asynchronous instructional modules will fill out the rest of the course and help prepare students to take part in the more intensive and personalized interactive sessions. Because this approach does not fit every section in the same way, we will publish revised classroom seating capacities once they are determined and ask each instructor to decide how best to satisfy this public health requirement.

Flexibility to Pivot to Remote Instruction

Anticipating that at various points during the academic year, individual students or instructors may not be able to be physically present in class (for reasons of illness, self-isolation, a compromised immune system, delays in gaining a student visa, etc.), such individuals will still be able to engage in synchronous components of their courses through videoconferencing technology (e.g., Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate). If a resurgence of the virus necessitates that Fordham suspend all face-to-face instruction for a period, the asynchronous portions of courses would be unaffected, while the synchronous portions would continue via videoconferencing technology with minimal disruption.

Student Community Building

Students have told us that during the past half-semester of remote learning, they missed more than anything else the opportunity to create and live in communities with one another. These feelings of isolation and disconnection are shared widely, and they have a negative impact on our students' ability to succeed in their academic work. Fordham will therefore create a new set of engaging, virtual activities and opportunities to enable our students to learn with and from one another, even at a distance. This summer, we will implement an expanded set of academic and personal development activities for incoming students. Virtual at first, and then in-person when we are able to return to campus, these structured small communities will provide a source of interpersonal connection to nourish and sustain our students at a time of uncertainty and disruption. The virtual communities will include select upperclass students as mentors, and the graduate and professional schools will be invited to explore similar approaches that would work for their own circumstances.

Fall 2020 Instruction

One question on everyone's mind is whether we will be able to resume in-person instruction at the beginning of the fall 2020 semester. It is our desire and intent to resume on-campus instruction, activities, and operations as soon as we are able without placing members of our community at undue risk. In alignment with this principle, Governor Cuomo is issuing directives on restarting New York State, and Fordham University will observe all state and federal regulations. While we cannot make accurate predictions today about the impact of the virus in fifteen weeks' time, we are proceeding with all the necessary planning for safely restarting Fordham's on-campus operations. We recognize that all members of the Fordham community, especially those joining us for the first time, desire certainty around which to plan. We will post brief updates by end-of-business each Friday on the [Fordham Coronavirus website](#) and will inform the community as soon as we know the contours of how we will proceed with the first day of fall classes on August 26.