



AAUP Statement on Online Synchronous Learning for Spring 2021

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The Southeastern Oklahoma State University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors recommends that all face-to-face classes be converted to online synchronous classes for the Spring 2021 semester.

Rationale: It has become abundantly clear this Fall semester that holding on-campus classes has created an environment which poses a risk to students, faculty, and staff, and in general has helped exacerbate the public health issues associated with the current pandemic. The state of Oklahoma has shown that it will not create policy of any kind to help mitigate the spread of the virus, and the same holds for the state of Texas, the two states from which the majority of our students reside. The number of cases in the midwest, in Oklahoma, and in particular - southeast Oklahoma and north Texas, have continued to rise, and there is no sign that this trend will change throughout the winter season. Furthermore, we have learned much more about the airborne transmission capabilities of COVID-19, and with this new knowledge, the classroom setting is not nearly as safe as once believed, even with all individuals wearing masks. See for instance, the editorial in the Lancet (October 29th, 2020 – [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600\(20\)30514-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(20)30514-2)):

As winter approaches in the northern hemisphere, the opportunity to socialise and exercise outdoors becomes more challenging and concerns are growing over the increased risk of transmission of COVID-19. Public health guidance now needs to advise people how to navigate risk in indoor settings and wearing facemasks is becoming mandatory in many countries for travelling on public transport, indoor shopping, and gatherings. Facemasks and shields offer protection from larger droplets but their effectiveness against airborne transmission is less certain. Advice on spending time indoors should also focus on improved ventilation and avoiding crowded spaces.

The interruption in student learning through quarantine, many times as a result of being in contact with other students in the same classroom, has caused a serious decline in student participation this semester. Even though hard data does not yet exist for the current semester, anecdotally, student attendance in the face-to-face setting is down while attendance in a synchronous online environment appears to be more stable. As a result of the interruptions students have encountered in face-to-face courses, student outcomes have not been met and grades are below average. I expect a significant increase in the DFW rate this fall, along with an increase in student appeals. The lack of a single, effective, and reliable teaching approach has caused confusion and a lack of continuity to the educational experience our students and faculty expect and require.

As educators and researchers, we need to take the experience of this Fall semester, and use it to make the Spring semester better. I believe everyone on this campus has worked hard to make this semester work, that is not in doubt, but with the information gathered thus far, a change should be made to move all face-to-face classes to synchronous online this Spring semester while students and faculty have time to adapt their plans. We need to take care of our students, our faculty, our staff, and our community, and face-to-face classes and requiring a large presence on campus is not part of that process.

Sincerely,
Karl Frinkle
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Professor of Mathematics