

June 2, 2020

Dear Returning Public Health Students,

We are looking forward to your return to our School of Public Health community in August and wanted to provide you with an update regarding plans for fall. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all our lives, both personally and professionally. Although we cannot be certain of what conditions will be like in Chicago in August, we need to put plans in place now for the new academic year.

We have talked with students and faculty and the overwhelming majority have said that the safest alternative would be to plan for classes to be conducted online for the fall 2020 semester. Consequently, all of our general education courses (PUBH 100, 110, and 120) and our fall core courses (PUBH 300: Critical Thinking in Public Health; PUBH 330: Health Equity and Health Disparities; PUBH 350: Health Systems, Health Policy; PUBH 370: Using the Public Health Toolbox; PUBH 395: Professional Topics Seminar; and PUBH 410: Historical and Contemporary Public Health Challenges I) will be taught online. While the required courses scheduled for fall semester 2020 will be available via distance format, we hope that a few public health selective classes will be offered on campus, although the majority of those will also be online. As you plan, please remember that we control only classes with the PUBH rubric. Other public health classes that you might want to take as selectives are managed by the Divisions in which they are housed. Keep in mind that we do not control any courses that are offered by other colleges and departments.

There were a number of variables that we considered in making this decision, a few of which I will highlight here. Although the number of new cases in Illinois is slowing, it is still high. The majority of students, faculty and staff utilize public transportation to get to campus and could be exposed to COVID-19 during their daily commute. There are limited spaces on campus that would allow for social distancing, and those classrooms are in demand across the 90+ majors that exist at UIC. Some students and faculty have conditions that put them at higher risk, and others live in households with those at higher risk. Students need to make decisions about housing soon and may elect to move or not to move if commuting to campus poses a risk. Making the decision to teach remotely means that faculty can continue to work now to develop high quality, student-centered online courses to be ready for implementation in August.

Over the summer months, faculty will be working with UIC instructional designers and SPH course builders to transition courses to the online format. Courses and webinars in online pedagogy will be offered to ensure that our classes are both engaging and of high quality. PUBH classes will largely be taught asynchronously so that students have flexibility in their schedules for work or caregiving responsibilities; however, there will be some opportunities in each course to meet virtually and in real time with fellow students and faculty. Smaller discussion sections and individual meetings will be scheduled to make sure that students are engaged and involved in their public health education with options to participate in special social activities, lectures, and other events, as conditions allow. The SPH Undergraduate Advisor, Kevin Price (kevprice@uic.edu), as well as the SPH peer support specialists, career services, and student services staff are already available to work with students virtually. Keep in mind that the UIC campus has generated a number of resources to support and assist you as you move forward through your education in the midst of a pandemic. We fully appreciate the additional challenges that you and your families may be incurring.

We have all seen that a skilled and competent public health work force is needed now more than ever! Continuing your public health education this fall means that you will soon be prepared to tackle the challenges of COVID-19 and the future. We will be in touch frequently throughout the summer, but please feel free to reach out to us with questions and concerns. Your support team of academic administrators, advisors, and the entire Office of Academic Affairs are available to provide an array of services related to your success. Our contact information is provided below.

We look forward to connecting with you!

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