UMCES Education Information and FAQs

COVID-19 Response

Updated 10 April 2020

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Summary of Current Status

Classes were cancelled from March 16 through March 27 and resumed on March 30. Classroom instruction will be online for the rest of the semester. Please note, the semester has NOT been extended. The last day of classes is Tuesday, May 12th, with final exams scheduled for May 14th through May 20th. The last day to withdraw from a UMCP/UMCES course has been moved to May 12th.

All graduate courses in the spring 2020 have moved to a satisfactory/fail (S/F) grading system unless a student elects to receive the earned letter grade for the course. If a student does not elect to receive a letter grade, all letter grades of C- and above will be converted to an S, while all grades below a C- will be converted to an F. Students have until May 12, 2020 to make that choice.

UMCES will not host its originally scheduled in-person commencement ceremony this year, but degrees will still be granted this semester. We are looking into alternative options to honor those who have successfully completed their degrees, including an online ceremony on the day and the time of the originally scheduled commencement, May 29th at 1 PM. Some kind of in-person hooding ceremony is being planned for a later date and will be communicated as soon as possible.

We ask that you be patient in this transition. Should you have specific concerns, please direct them to the UMCES Vice President for Education's office at education@umces.edu

Course Suggestions for Faculty

- Reconsider your syllabus for spring 2020. One full week of instruction will be lost. Decide what you will cut from the course and let the students know. Adjust student assignments and assessments accordingly. Let the education office and the UMCES PCC know what you have decided (this can simply be a copy of what you communicate to the students).

- Have a backup plan in case you cannot teach as planned for any reason. Make sure a co-instructor or one of your senior students can cover for you. Use previous recordings of your lectures or record new ones in advance. We cannot afford to miss more lectures this semester.
- Think out-of-the-box for problems that may arise. For example, if you have a field trip cancelled, can you find a relevant video to substitute and then find example data for the students to analyze?
- Consider setting up regular online office hours using whatever medium works best for you. Set up a dedicated Q&A Google page, or utilize the Moodle Forum capability more fully.
- Throughout this semester, we encourage continued transparency between faculty and their students, sustained academic integrity, and thoughtful management of expectations as everyone adjusts to new modes of working.
- Please be mindful of any students with potential accessibility issues and let the VPE Office know if a student is in need of additional accommodations.
- For additional teaching recourses from UMCP, please see their instructor resource website: https://svp.umd.edu/keepteaching/instructor-resources. Some of these suggestions are specific to the UMCP system, but there are many good tips that UMCES instructors can use.
- Communicate with your class and with the VPE Office. We are all in this together and are trying to do our best under difficult circumstances and lots of external stress. Be kinder than necessary!

Zoom

Zoom is a web-based application enabling faculty, staff, and students to host meetings, webinars, and conference calls remotely. UMCES has a number of Zoom login credentials for use. Please contact your lab's assistant director or IT group for more information on your lab's credentials. To download Zoom for your desktop, laptop, or mobile device, please see the Zoom website: https://zoom.us/download.

UMCES recommends the use of Zoom, but Cisco Webex is also a good, accessible platform for online teaching. Please be sure that all class participants are aware of and have access to the chosen platform before class.

UMCES IT Director Kurt Florez has identified the following minimum requirements for a successful Zoom connection: An internet connection that is at least broadband wired or wireless (3G or 4G/LTE). Minimum bandwidth is 600kbps (up/down) and recommended is 1.5 Mbps (up/down). Check your Internet bandwidth using Speed Test: https://www.speedtest.net/

Be aware that internet connection speeds may be somewhat slower during class times. If you are having trouble with connections, turn off your video camera and, if necessary, call in using your phone. This will prioritize better reception of the "classroom" information feed.

Zoom IT support requests and questions can be emailed to UMCES IT Coordinator, Kurt Florez, kflorez@umces.edu. Please also see the Zoom website for Zoom support (https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us) and tutorials on the various Zoom features (https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206618765-Zoom-Video-Tutorials)

Originating Zoom for Your Courses and Meetings

Make sure you have access to a dedicated UMCES Zoom account for originating class. Most often this will be the account you used previously from the classroom, but it may require signing in from home. Try it out from home before your first class!

Consider watching this Zoom tutorial presentation by UMCES student Ben Frey (~10 minutes): https://youtu.be/mMxUCCn9ubo

Recording Your Zoom Lectures

Please record your Zoom lectures, both for students who may have to miss the class and for potential future use. To record your course on Zoom, there is a record button on the bottom right of the Zoom screen. Click the option to record and make sure the button is 'on' (pause and stop icons will be visible). Some classes may be set to record automatically; if so, don't turn it off! There is an option to save to the cloud or save directly to your computer. We recommend saving your lectures to your local computer and afterwards uploading the video directly to your Moodle site or wherever you distribute your course materials.

Sharing Your Screen and Whiteboard Option

Zoom has the capability of sharing your screen with your students during a lecture. When utilizing this feature, make sure to have the document or window already open that you wish to share. To share your screen, click the Share Screen button and then select the screen you wish to share. For more information on screen sharing, see the Zoom tutorial: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362153-Sharing-your-screen

Zoom also has the option of using a whiteboard for teaching and sharing information. This feature is located under the Share Screen button. This tool works best for those who have a graphic pad or touch screen.

Breakout Rooms

Instructors can initiate breakout rooms and manually choose the participants in each room. Check your settings on Zoom to see if the breakout room option is turned on.

Zoom Meeting Passwords

UMCES will now be requiring passwords for all Zoom meetings, including courses. IT will be setting a default configuration on all UMCES Zoom meeting accounts that will automatically generate a password along with the meeting link, so there is nothing you need to do. Passwords are required to prevent non-invited guests from entering your meetings.

This default setting will make all future meetings require passwords for Zoom Clients and dial-in attendees. These options, however, can be overridden at the user level. Passwords can be automatically generated or specified. New meeting links will have embedded passwords for ease of dispersion. Previously created meetings will not be altered; they will have to be modified by the user to generate a

password. The links will not change for modified events unless requested.

Note: some meetings may use waiting rooms, where the instructor needs to admit students to the session.

Additional Tips:
- If possible, we recommend wearing a headset or headphones if you are attending a Zoom meeting. This reduces outside noise and allows for everyone in the course or conference to fully engage without outside distractions.
- Utilize the Zoom chat feature to field questions and comments from students.
- Download the Zoom App on your phone as a potential back-up if your internet connection becomes unstable.

Online Committee Meetings, Comprehensive Exams, and Defenses

All milestones, including Ph.D. and M.S. defenses, must be held remotely and provisions must be made for participation in the public presentation portion of the defense as well as the private committee defense. To register for a remote defense, please complete the form at go.umd.edu/gs-rrd

UMD has posted detailed advice for remote dissertation and thesis defenses: https://gradschool.umd.edu/newsroom/remote-dissertation-thesis-defense-advice . One of the most important recommendations is to have the advisor set up and host the remote defense.

We have also come across a nice blog post from a faculty member at the University of Florida who has recently participated in remote defenses. He gives excellent suggestions that might be worth looking into. https://threader.app/thread/1240336385896316928 There are lots more – if you find a particularly good one, please let us know at education@umces.edu and we will post it to this Educational Resources page.

For students who have upcoming comprehensive exams and faculty having to administer them, parts of these exams may need to be proctored remotely. For comprehensive exam questions originally intended to be in-person and closed-book, we recommend the use of LockDown Browser, coupled with a monitored webcam. LockDown can be downloaded here: (https://download.respondus.com/lockdown/download.php?id=228545938).

LockDown Browser will allow the student to take an exam, but will prevent the student from any printing, accessing of applications, copying, or going to unauthorized websites. For more information on LockDown Browser, please see this video (~3 minutes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuX8WoeAycs

There should be no need to make special arrangements for take-home format comprehensive exam questions, other than those that have been used previously.

Moodle

If you have a question about Moodle, please email moodlefeedback@umces.edu

Additional Resources

- GoogleSuite (Google Drive, Docs, Sheets, Slides) for your computer and phone. Easily collaborate on documents using the Google Drive. Make sure that you set your document sharing permissions properly.
- Utilization of the [Adobe Creative Cloud Suite](#)
- This is a stressful time for everyone and it's easy to feel overwhelmed. It's OK to reach out for help. Many counseling centers are moving to provide services remotely to help people during this time: Please utilize the [UMCES Mental Healthcare Resources](#) for finding a mental healthcare provider in your area or students may access the [Counseling Center at UMCP](#)

General FAQs

1. As a faculty member, I have an international student starting in my lab in the fall of 2020. Do you anticipate any changes to their admission status?

   International students admitted for the fall 2020 may face difficulties getting their visas issued, as the U.S. has closed consular visa processing until June in many countries. We have confirmed with the UMCP graduate office that it should possible for international students to enroll and take fall classes remotely if the visa is delayed until 2021. We can also defer admission to the program until spring if necessary. Please contact the MEES office soon if you have an incoming student that may have a visa issue so we can be proactive in handling this situation.

2. How long are research restrictions in place? Is an UMCES field site considered any location where research is conducted or is it specific locations?

   UMCES is under **severe** restrictions on research beginning March 25 at 5 p.m., until further notice. All laboratory and field work requiring a physical presence at an UMCES campus or field site should cease. Researchers should move to maintenance operations, which include maintaining and caring for animals, important instruments, and cell lines. Research at an exceptional critical phase requires written approval by the Laboratory Director with a description of the activity and precautions to be taken.

3. What do I do if I have a milestone that requires a meeting (comprehensive exams, a defense, etc.)?

   All milestones, including Ph.D. and M.S. defenses, must be held remotely and provisions must be made for participation in the public presentation portion of the defense. To request permission for a remote defense, please complete the form at go.umd.edu/gs-rrd

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There should be no need to make special arrangements for take-home format comprehensive exam questions, other than those that have been used previously.

4. Are the deadlines still in place for spring 2020 submission of final theses and dissertations?

At this point, the deadlines for submitting final theses and dissertations remain unchanged: April 21 for Dissertations and April 28 for Theses. See https://gradschool.umd.edu/coronavirus/frequently-asked-questions. If students get everything uploaded and signed off by May 29th, then they will graduate in the summer but won't have to register for summer and won't incur any additional fees. Students who can't meet the May 29th deadline but want to graduate in the summer will need to register for one credit of 799 or 899, but the Office of Extended Studies is offering the credit for free. The summer deadlines are July 31 (PhD) and Aug 14 (MS).

5. I have a question about my bill, but the UMCP offices are working remotely. How do I get in touch with the bursar's office?

Per the UMD BillPay website, "In conjunction with University of Maryland as a whole, our office is currently closed to in person visitors. We are still staffed remotely and working for you during standard office hours and can receive emails at billtalk@umd.edu. Please bear with us as *some* services may be delayed or temporarily unavailable due to external department closures."

"Additionally, in an effort to assist families, our office will NOT be assessing the typical late fees on student account balances in March, 2020"

6. How do I contact the registrar and graduate school? Are there any procedural changes?

Please continue to reach out to offices if you are in need of information or have any questions. We recommend communicating via email rather than phone (Graduate School: gradschool@umd.edu and The Registrar's Office: registrar-help@umd.edu) as the primary means of communication. Please include your UID when reaching out. See this website for any changes to the registrar's functions: https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vT7YrDxCXOcRNJiFc5oUbjljVs4LtVKW8KPkwJnOuislXYgKq_VYTPAdeN7rcCmEYEPSUalT78Xyccl/pub.

The MEES Office is also functioning remotely and is most efficiently reached via email at MEES@umd.edu. They are ready and eager to help!

7. Where can I find additional information as an international student?

For international student concerns, please see
https://gradschool.umd.edu/coronavirus/isssmessage. For specific UMCES employment
concerns, please contact Human Resources personnel at your home unit and/or Center
Administration; see https://www.umces.edu/human-resources.

8. What is the last day to withdraw from a UMCP/UMCES course?

   The last day to withdraw from a UMCP/UMCES class has been moved to May 12th.

9. Will UMCES be hosting a commencement ceremony this year (2020)?

   UMCES will not host its originally scheduled in-person commencement ceremony this year, but
   degrees will still be granted this semester**.** We are looking into alternative options to honor
   those who have successfully completed their degrees, including an online ceremony on the day
   and the time of the originally scheduled commencement, May 29th at 1 PM. Some kind of in-
   person hooding ceremony is being planned for a later date and will be communicated as soon as
   possible.

10. Will it be possible to adjust grading methods for students who are having extra problems with
   remote teaching? What are the satisfactory/fail grading methods that are being implemented?

   UMCES will follow UMCP's lead in changes to the grading system. All graduate courses in the
   spring 2020 will move to a satisfactory/fail (S/F) grading system unless a student elects to
   receive the earned grade for the course. If a student does not elect to receive a letter grade, all
   letter grades of C- and above will be converted to an S, while all grades below a C- will be
   converted to an F. Students have until May 12, 2020 to make that choice. More information can
   be found on the UMCP website pertaining to S/F grading.
   https://gradschool.umd.edu/newsroom/satisfactory-fail-grading