Summary Results of Faculty Senate Executive Committee Survey on Patriot Tiger Team Report

The George Mason University Faculty Senate Executive Committee distributed a short questionnaire to instructional, administrative, professional, and research faculty to capture their responses to the Patriot Tiger Team Report. The questionnaire asked participants questions about the four specific options described in the Tiger Team Report as well as their comfort levels on specific components of the four options. Participants were also given the opportunity to describe what they saw as challenges ahead, the resources they would need to be successful in the fall, and general questions and overall comments. A total of 533 individuals responded to the questionnaire, although not all completed all sections of the instrument.

Feasibility
Faculty ranked the four options as follows as most to least feasible: All online (Option 4), Return to Campus – Scaled Down (Option 1), Split Curriculum (Option 3), Return to Campus – Scaled Up (Option 4).

Although the Return to Campus options include weekend delivery of instruction, few faculty are willing to teach on the weekends.

Online Preparation
Faculty believe they can be ready for full online delivery of classes for fall and want to begin that transition process as soon as possible.

Safety
A majority of faculty would not be comfortable with in-person classes even with appropriate physical distancing measures in place.

Challenges
When asked to identify challenges, faculty identified a number of challenges that can fit into four broad categories: uncertainty, health concerns, pedagogical concerns, and technology support concerns.

Uncertainty
1. About how to plan for the fall: need a decision so that we can start to prepare classes and plan for other constraints, having to change plans midstream will be disruptive
2. About COVID: not knowing what transmission will be like, whether there is a resurgence, timeline for antibody testing & vaccine
3. About childcare: no certainty about when/whether childcare centers and K-12 schools will open, many are uncomfortable sending children to daycare/school even if schools are open, concerns about balancing work and family obligations with children at home
4. About economy and finances: concerns about pay cuts, furloughs, & layoffs

Health Concerns
1. About self & family: comorbidities, health risks vulnerable family members
2. About safety of campus: can’t control others’ compliance with precautions, not confident in ability to keep everyone safe, campus as a superspreader location with numerous contacts/day, too many common areas (hallways, staircases, elevators, restrooms, offices) in which it is too hard to maintain distance and ventilate
3. Access to PPE, COVID tests, antibody tests, etc.; need for temperature checks
Pedagogical Concerns
1. Stretching faculty too thin: moving courses online will take a lot of work, and online courses can be more labor-intensive to teach; multiple preps will be harder to develop online, especially hard for 4-4 faculty; some faculty lack basic technology skills; hybrid model seems untenable to many faculty,
2. Many courses that can’t easily go online: music, laboratories, field work, film classes
3. Staffing needs: if we need to have smaller sections, we will need to offer more sections and hire more faculty
4. Student engagement: challenges building relationships and creating community in online classes, desire to be able to teach synchronous classes instead of being forced to develop asynchronous courses, responding to student stress

Technology Support
1. Need instructional design support and training to build effective online courses
2. Technology capacity limits: overloaded platforms, challenges with Blackboard, exam monitoring
3. Many faculty to not have Mason-issued technology that is adequate for online teaching and are having to rely on personal technology instead
4. Some faculty live in areas with unreliable internet access and need to have an option to teach online from campus office
5. Course registration system: since we already let students register, we need a way to convert current courses to online classes; system needs to allow for more options for synchronous/asynchronous blended courses

Resources Needed
While many faculty noted that they already have all of the resources that they need in order to prepare the fall semester, others noted

- Online course development support: courses and workshops for online course development and for using Blackboard, live support for help while building online courses,
- Reliable technology platforms: WebEx or Zoom, VPN, email, and Blackboard need to be more reliable
- Technology upgrades: upgraded computer or Ipad/Surface with enough memory to support additional online work, webcams and audio equipment, devices that can be written on as a digital whiteboard for online classes, document cameras, better software for recording and editing videos
- Access to campus: some need short term access to pick up books and materials, others need ongoing access to be able to use their offices to do work
- PPE, frequent testing, disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, and plexiglass on lecterns if we are on campus
- Partial library availability to pick up books, digitize materials
- A resource that can help students learn to use the technology so that faculty are not using a lot of time to teach students how to use our technology platforms
- Course releases, GTA support to assist in developing course materials and preparing lab spaces for physical distancing
- A way to support work in labs and/or be able to send appropriate lab equipment to students
• Stipends for summer course development work and training, access to funds to purchase needed technology
• Childcare
• Home office needs: ergonomic chairs, printers, desk, internet

**Most Common Questions**

• When will we have a plan for the fall?
• How will we address budget shortfalls, and how soon will we know about possible impacts on pay, employment, and tuition?
• What safety protocols will be in place when we return to campus, and how will they be enforced?
• How will we fairly distribute workloads (especially for term faculty) and account for them in the tenure & promotion process?
• What resources will be available to support course development and to compensate for the additional work of transitioning classes online?
• How will we decide which students get to come back to campus?
• How will faculty be involved in decisions about how we will move forward and how we will manage budget deficits?
• How will we support students who do not have adequate internet and technology?