

UNE's Planning for Undergraduate Education for Fall Term 2020

Dear Nor'easters:

I know you have all been eagerly awaiting further details regarding the fall 2020 semester at the University of New England, and I am pleased to share this update with you. As you read through this information, I hope you will see that the health and safety of our students, faculty, professional staff, and our community is always our highest priority. We also remain committed to delivering the highest quality educational experience we can to fulfill our mission. Given the many impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting state and federal safety and health guidelines, we are balancing many factors in developing a plan for a return to campus-based education for you. We believe our plan optimizes your educational advancement while creating and allowing us to maintain the safest environment we can under current conditions.

The senior leadership at UNE has been working since March on this plan, in collaboration with your faculty, professional staff, health experts, state officials, our colleagues within other higher education institutions across the region, and others. The specifics of this plan continue to evolve and may be modified in the coming months as conditions warrant and as our understanding of the virus and its effects on human health become better understood. The basic outlines of the UNE academic plan are presented below so you can anticipate what to expect when you join us this fall.

This letter focuses specifically on the academic schedule and our plans for teaching and learning. I am sure you have questions about many other aspects of the UNE experience for the fall. In order to address all of these, we have developed a comprehensive website here: une.edu/onward that provides all the aspects of our fall planning in more detail, and it will be updated regularly as our plans evolve with more details. In addition to academic plans, this site includes detailed information about housing, dining, athletics, student health services, academic support services, links to additional resources, and other information that we know is of interest to you and your parents. Please refer to this website and check back regularly to keep informed about our plans.

Academic Calendar

Orientation for new students will take place from Friday, August 21 through Tuesday, August 25. Move-in to dorms will be phased over several weeks in August so that we can safely have students and their families drop off belongings into their rooms prior to the beginning of the term without all coming at once, as we used to do previously with Move-In Day. More information about this schedule and logistics will be provided by Student Affairs later this summer and will also be found on the website mentioned above.

The fall term will begin as previously scheduled with classes starting on Wednesday, August 26 and the term ending at the end of exam week on Friday, December 11. We will be compressing the academic calendar for fall by having full classes and other activities on the three previously scheduled holidays, i.e., Monday, September 7 (Labor Day), Fall Break (Friday, October 9), and Veterans' Day Observance (Monday, November 11). This will allow us to extend the Thanksgiving Break. All in-person classes will end on Friday, November 20, and all resident students will go home after the end of classes that Friday. Everyone will have the full week of Thanksgiving as a fall holiday (Saturday, November 21 through Sunday, November 29). Classes will resume for the last week of instruction on Monday, November 30 through Friday, December 4, *but by remote means only*. Friday, December 4 will be the last day of classes and the last day for undergraduates to withdraw with a grade of W. Exam week will run from Monday, December 7 through Friday, December 11 as usual, *but by remote means only*. The official end of the term will be Friday, December 11. The spring term is still currently scheduled to begin on Wednesday, January 13, 2021.

For those of you enrolled in some of UNE's health sciences programs, please note that you may need to return to campus following the Thanksgiving Break for clinical skills assessments that cannot be scheduled prior to the holiday break and that are required for progression to the next semester. Students in these programs will receive additional communications from their program about the specifics of their calendar, if it is different than the general schedule described above.

Teaching and Learning

In order to accommodate the requirement for 6-foot social distancing in our classrooms, teaching labs, and other instructional and support areas, we are adjusting class sizes accordingly. Most of our classrooms and other spaces, when configured to accommodate this distancing, are now at 40-50% of their prior capacity. This has meant taking the majority of class sections and dividing them into two sub-groups for face-to-face meeting times. Balancing student schedules, classroom availability, and faculty schedules, we have developed the following plan in order to have a high-quality educational experience for you within these parameters.

Essentially, all undergraduate classes will be taught in the familiar 90-minute block scheduling format (80 minutes of instruction), either Monday-Wednesday or Tuesday-Thursday. Some classes may also be taught on Friday in these same 90-minute blocks. Likewise, the majority of teaching labs will be taught in three-hour blocks, Monday through Friday. Classes will be taught in what we call a hybrid format, with each sub-group of students meeting once a week face-to-face in one of the two scheduled times (e.g., if your class is M-W 9:30-11 a.m. your sub-group will meet either Monday or Wednesday). The other portion of your coursework will be done remotely using our Learning Management System, Blackboard. Labs will be taught for three hours, as usual, but each subgroup will attend lab in person every other week, i.e., alternating between the sub-groups. The other portion of the lab-based work will also be done remotely (modeling, data analysis, demonstrations, etc.). There may be some exceptions to this for a few specialized courses, but this will be the basic format.

When you combine this hybrid model with the block schedule outlined above, a typical course schedule for you will look something like the following: Let's say there are 30 students in one of your courses, and it is scheduled to meet from 1 to 2:30 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday with a lab that meets on Friday

from 8 to 11 a.m. Let's also say you have been assigned to Group A, which will be half of the class, or 15 students. Group A will then attend the face-to-face session on Monday, and Group B, the other 15 students, will attend their face-to-face session on Wednesday. On the days Group A does not attend the face-to-face session (in this example, that would be Wednesday), they will complete their online course assignments remotely. For the laboratory portions of the course, you will attend every other week, i.e. Group A will attend weeks 1, 3, 5, etc. and Group B on weeks 2, 4, 6, etc. On the weeks when Group A is not in the laboratory, they will again complete their online laboratory assignments, which may include data analysis, writing laboratory reports, etc.

We strongly urge you to complete your remote work for each class during its normally scheduled time, i.e., if you are in a M-W class and attend that class face-to-face on Monday as Group A, like the example above, you should do your remote work during the same class time on Wednesday. This will allow you to stay on track and provide a framework for time management. The remote work can also be reviewed at other times, i.e., it will always be available, but we know from experience that keeping up with all classes with a structured schedule will best help you to stay on track and address any questions or concerns about the material as soon as possible either in the face-to-face session or during faculty remote-based office hours, review sessions, and other access methods. In addition to the remote-only material, where feasible, the face-to-face class sessions will be recorded and posted to Blackboard so that you can review those sessions at any time. These recorded sessions also allow a student who misses a face-to-face class to access the same material and discussion easily by Blackboard. Should you need to miss face-to-face class due to illness; self-isolation, if you are suspected of having contact with a COVID-positive individual; or other reasons, you will be able to keep up with each class in a fully remote manner during that absence, between the online content and remote access to the recorded face-to-face sessions.

The hybrid teaching and learning model has been developed over the past 20 years in higher education and is a very effective method for learning. In fact, in studies of different teaching modalities, the hybrid model was not only the most popular model among U.S. undergraduates (as compared to face-to-face only or online only), it is also the most effective based on student performance on standardized tests and recall of material one year later. Many of our faculty are already teaching in, and have developed their courses around, the hybrid model, and all of our faculty are familiar with use of Blackboard, Zoom, and other technologies for remote learning based on our collective experience in shifting to remote-only instruction during the second half of the spring term due to the COVID emergency. We are confident that you and your peers will readily adapt to, and do well in, this hybrid format. We will be providing workshops for new students on how this hybrid format will work during Orientation in late August, and similarly will provide a review and other resources for returning students on this format as they re-enter their programs.

We also have robust support services for you, which will be accessible both in person and remotely, including our professional advising staff in the Student Advising Center, the tutoring and academic support specialists in our Student Academic Success Center (SASC), counseling and accommodation support through our Division of Student Support, two greatly expanded Student Health Services Centers (one on each campus), the support services of Student Affairs, and other support services.

Student Schedules for Fall 2020

To summarize the model above, students will attend each of their classes once a week face-to-face and will complete the remainder of their work remotely in between class times. Students taking labs will attend every other week. This will greatly simplify each student's classroom-based schedule. To the greatest extent possible, we will be working out the scheduling of classes and assignment of sub-groups to avoid or minimize any change in your current schedule. However, some students may have to have their schedules adjusted as we balance all the sections and meeting times, particularly if that creates a conflict in your current schedule. Should an adjustment be necessary in your schedule, your academic advisor will work directly with you to create a revised schedule in a way that works best for you.

Please note: We will be running test scenarios in our scheduling system on student and faculty schedules and classroom assignments in the coming weeks. During testing, students may receive a notice via the EAB Navigate app that their schedule has changed. If you have not yet done so, you can download and access content in Navigate Student app through the Apple App Store or Google Play by searching for "Navigate Student," or use the desktop version. Please do not be concerned about these messages as we run these scenarios. If your schedule does need to be changed after running these tests and determining the optimal overall schedule, you will be contacted directly by an advisor at your @une.edu email address to discuss and resolve schedule conflicts.

Again, more information about this and other planning for the fall term can be found on the UNE web pages here: [une.edu/onward](https://www.une.edu/onward), which will be updated regularly. Contact information is also provided below for specific questions. We believe these changes to the academic program will allow us to return to delivering high-quality, campus-based programs while maintaining a safe environment for our students, faculty, and professional staff. We greatly look forward to seeing you all again this fall.

Sincerely,

Joshua W. Hamilton Ph.D.
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

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See a list of offices and services here: www.une.edu/about/offices-services