

Preparation for Online Teaching During 2020 S Semester and S1/S2 Terms

1. Introduction

As you know, a new form of pneumonia caused by the novel coronavirus COVID-19 has spread throughout the world and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11. In order to prevent infections with this serious illness, the Education Management Committee of the University of Tokyo decided on March 17 to implement online teaching throughout the university. As previously mentioned at the Junior Division Management Committee, General Affairs Committee, and Faculty Meeting, all of us at the Graduate School and College of Arts and Sciences now need to make preparations to teach online. The details are explained below.

2. Preparation for Online Teaching

Many faculty members have expressed reservations about online learning. I, too, feel strongly that, as shown by recent discussions among our faculty, our university has been able to maintain its high level of education only because of the dedication and skill of our faculty in face-to-face teaching. For that very reason, the Dean's Office has carefully studied other options as well. Those options include delaying the start of classes and continuing teaching in person while implementing the maximum possible measures against infection.

However, under the public health measures now being implemented to delay the spread of the virus, much time will be needed to bring infections under control. Even if we did delay the start of classes, it would be difficult to decide now when in-person classes could resume. UTokyo also faces many challenges not shared by other universities. In the Junior Division, for example, the schedule for the process of determining students' promotion to the Upper Division can be delayed by no more than two weeks. Such a delay would also push the final exam period into the midsummer break, when the science graduate programs hold and mark their entrance examinations.

If we insisted on continuing only with in-person classes, we would have nothing to fall back on if students or teachers became infected or if the government declares a state of emergency. The cancellation of most classes for the S Semester would have a devastating effect on our students' futures, and it might even make it difficult for us to accept new students next year. These are outcomes that we must avoid. We also need to consider, of course, our faculty and staff who are in vulnerable age groups as well as students who

have health issues. In addition, we know that there are quite a few faculty members and international students who either will not be able to return to Japan in April or, if they do return, will have to remain at home for the time being.

For these reasons, having heard ideas and opinions from many faculty members, I would like ask that the Graduate School and College of Arts and Sciences keep to our original schedule of starting classes on April 6 and to request all faculty members' cooperation in moving our classes online to the greatest extent possible.

Because of the many concerns expressed about online teaching, we considered adopting a hybrid approach, that is, a combination of online and face-to-face teaching, for some class sizes and types. However, such an approach would not effectively reduce the number of people on campus. In addition, as explained below, because students will be expected to participate in online classes at home, they would not be able to move to and from campus in time to participate in both in-person and online classes that are scheduled back-to-back. Therefore, we have decided that the move to online teaching must apply to as many classes as possible in both the Junior and Senior Divisions and the Graduate School.

3. What You Need to Do

This decision does not mean that all classes will necessarily be taught online from the very beginning of the semester. Rather, we ask you to get ready now so that you can move your classes online immediately if the situation requires it. By preparing for online teaching now, you will be less rushed and will be able to teach more effectively in person (while being careful about infection, of course) while also satisfying our students' desire to start classes soon.

We have already begun collecting ideas from faculty about how to teach online in the most practical and effective ways. Beginning next week, a workshop on online teaching will be held several times for both full-time and part-time faculty. Among the topics to be covered are the hardware that teachers will need and the free software that you can use. Easy-to-understand manuals in both Japanese and English will soon be ready as well. (The specific tools being considered at present are described below.) I urge all faculty members to take part in this workshop, either in person or online.

Based on discussions at a special meeting of the General Affairs Committee today, I plan to send a message tomorrow both to current students and to incoming students and their parents or guardians. In that message, I will ask them to prepare the computer equipment and Internet access necessary for online learning. This will give them some time to make the necessary arrangements. I would like the faculty to make the final decision about online teaching at a special faculty colloquium or by another means by the end of March. As soon as that decision has been made, it will be announced officially.

While we of course give top priority to the health of our faculty and students, the Dean's Office is also concerned about limiting the burden on faculty and any decline in educational effectiveness that might result from a shift to online classes. We also recognize that not all subjects can be taught online. While it might be necessary to start teaching online from the very first week of classes, we also understand the importance of providing in-person contact at first so that the students can get to know each other and so that students and teachers can start building bonds of trust and can discuss how to proceed after classes go online. We will therefore continue, until the very start of the semester, to consider whether in-person classes might be possible. We hope to be able to delay the start of online teaching as long as possible not only to allow teachers to prepare but also because of the difficulty students might have obtaining computers due to production delays in China and the time they will need to arrange Internet connections. Nevertheless, we must still do everything we can to prevent clusters of infection from forming at Komaba.

4. Current Plans

The following provisional measures are the ones that we are considering as of March 18. We will inform you as to when and how we will implement online teaching by the end of March.

- First and second class meetings: The students will be divided into two equally sized groups. The students in the first group will take the class during the first meeting, and the students in the second group will receive the same lecture during the second meeting. The teacher will wear a mask and ensure adequate ventilation, and teacher and students will wash their hands carefully. This measure will reduce the number of people on campus by about half.
- Classes will shift completely to online format beginning with the third class meeting. If the situation with infections improves, it might be possible to return to in-person classes after a few weeks or months.
- Because two meetings will be necessary to cover the first lesson, the missing lesson can be made up for through a scheduled make-up class, an extra online class on a day when no regular classes are scheduled, extra assignments, etc.
- The third and later meetings of classes that require in-person contact, including physical education and science labs, will be conducted online and through homework assignments as appropriate. Arrangements will be made as flexibly as possible, including possibly scheduling in-person classes for weekends and holidays, giving those classes priority for make-up class slots, and creating new make-up class slots; we will take advantage of the extra time made available by most of the other classes finishing on schedule.

- Because the situation might change in unexpected ways, teachers will be asked to be flexible in their grading.

To aid in our decision-making, we have established the following guidelines based on how much the infection is spreading. The provisional measures described above are based on the situation described under Stage Yellow.

Guidelines for deciding whether to switch between in-person and online teaching

As mentioned above, the situation as of today (March 18) is Stage Yellow. A sudden change to Stage Orange or Red is very possible, however, so please begin preparations for online teaching immediately.

Stage Red

Based on a declaration of a state of emergency, the governor of Tokyo orders people to stay at home and prohibits the use of school facilities. All classes are therefore conducted online. Nearly all students are forbidden to come to campus. Club and other extracurricular activities are prohibited.

Stage Orange

More than one student, faculty member, or staff member in the Junior Division, Senior Division, or Graduate School at Komaba has been diagnosed as infected and cannot come to campus. All classes except some practicums and physical education are conducted online. As a rule, all club and extracurricular activities on campus are banned; in unavoidable cases, however, students can apply for and receive permission for the use of campus facilities.

Stage Yellow

The number of new infections in Japan continues at about the current level. (Specifically, the number of new infections per day stays between a few dozen and 200.) Either the first two class meetings will be held in person or equivalent assignments will be given to students. After that, the classes will be conducted online. Practicums and physical education classes can be held in person as long as measures are taken to prevent infections. Students will be asked to refrain from conducting club and extracurricular activities that require large numbers of people to gather on campus.

Stage Green

The spread of new infections has stopped completely or nearly completely. Classes will be conducted in person as usual. (In this case, in-person teaching may be combined with online teaching.) Extracurricular activities may take place as usual.

Please note that the above guidelines have been devised by the Graduate School and College of Arts and Sciences based on the facilities and population density of UTokyo's Komaba Campus. They may not directly reflect the broader infection situation or decisions at other UTokyo campuses or other universities.

5. Other Information

The following information about technology is for your reference.

Limitations on online teaching at Komaba

- While wireless internet connections are available on the Komaba Campus through UTokyo WiFi and Eduroam, the overall capacity is insufficient for large-scale videoconferencing and file transfers. In addition, some buildings have very weak WiFi reception. It would therefore not be practical for students or teachers to use empty classrooms for online classes.
- Students will therefore be asked to take part in online classes from their homes. Full-time teachers may teach from their offices or homes. Part-time teachers may teach from their homes or from their full-time workplace; with the cooperation of the Komaba faculty member or department with which they are affiliated, they might also be able use a location at Komaba.
- Special booths will be provided on campus for part-time faculty who would not, because of their travel schedules, be able to teach their classes online from a location other than Komaba.
- Computers will be made available on campus to students who are unable to arrange Internet access at their homes in time. The number of computers available at any one time will be limited, however. Faculty are therefore asked to take such students' situations into consideration when teaching and deciding grades.
- Both UTokyo and the Graduate School and College plan to lend students equipment from our limited supply of computers and peripherals. If a faculty member needs computer equipment, please contact your department. (Part-time teachers should contact the faculty member or department with which they are affiliated.)

Three essential items for online teaching

1) A computer with a broadband Internet connection, a microphone, a headphone or earphone, and a camera

2) Zoom videoconferencing software

All full-time and part-time faculty have been issued accounts for the use of Zoom software. An invitation has been sent to your ECCS Cloud Mail address (@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp), and the software is now available for use. If you do not yet have an ECCS Cloud Mail address, please activate yours as soon as possible. The ECCS Cloud Mail system will be described in the workshops and manuals. Students will be able to participate in Zoom classes by clicking on links on UTAS. The main features of Zoom are as follows:

- a. Live streaming and recording of classes. Recording can be controlled by the teacher.
- b. Simultaneous two-way communication among up to 500 people. Larger numbers are possible in some cases. It is possible for any participant to speak and be heard by all others. There is also a hand-raising function that allows students to ask to be called on. Smaller, seminar-style classes are also possible.
- c. Simultaneous text chats among students and teacher. Students can point out mistakes to the teacher without interrupting the lecture. URLs can be exchanged easily through the chat function as well, and the teacher can use it as a simple blackboard.
- d. Sharing of the teacher's computer screen. The teacher can use word-processing software in place of a blackboard as well as share images and videos.
- e. File sharing
- f. Group discussions. Students divide into smaller groups online, and the teacher can monitor those individual group discussions.
- g. Zoom is accessible in China, where some other services are blocked.
- h. A virtual background can be added so that students and teachers do not need to hide or cover up the rooms behind them. (This is not possible with some computers.) It is also possible for students and teachers to participate by audio only.

3) ITC-LMS (UTokyo's learning management system)

You can log into ITC-LMS with the same UTokyo account that you use for entering syllabuses and grades on UTAS. ITC-LMS also allows you to distribute materials to students in advance and have your students answer questionnaires. Please be careful about copyright, as distributing materials online through ITC-LMS is regarded the same as distributing materials on paper.

6. Conclusion

We now face the greatest crisis to confront the University of Tokyo since the 2011 earthquake and nuclear accident. It is especially critical for us at Komaba because the College of Arts and Sciences has responsibility for all first- and second-year undergraduates and because our Graduate School has students from so many places around the world. We will be able to weather this crisis only with the cooperation of every faculty member. I understand well the unease many of you must feel about teaching online, as most of the faculty I work with closely have little or no experience with it. Please remember, however, the diligent efforts that our outstanding students have made in order to be able to study with you. While I ask you to do your very best to support and help our students in this difficult situation, please remember that, even online, they will continue to inspire us as well. The Graduate School and College will do everything we can to support you in the weeks and months ahead. I ask you to start getting ready now so that you can continue to share your scholarship and learning in these challenging times.

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