

UNIVERSITY LABORATORY HIGH SCHOOL

BACK-TO-SCHOOL PLANS & POLICIES FOR THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR

Uni High is excited to welcome our students back to school, even though we are unable to welcome them back to our building at this time. Nonetheless, we have a robust and engaging year of teaching and learning planned. Even as we are daunted by the challenges and concerns that COVID-19 confronts us all with, we are energized by the possibilities for this school year.

In some superficial ways—the fact that we are all-remote, the basic shape of our daily schedule—the plan for the first quarter of 2020-21 may look like the fourth quarter of 2019-20, but remote learning this year will be a different experience. Our teachers have been planning for remote or partly-remote teaching for months, and they are approaching their classes with new skills and ideas, having honed existing skills. We have been learning about and collaborating on ideas for motivating students via remote learning. Uni is also returning to our use of conventional A–F grades, which (while imperfect) should further address some of the struggles with academic motivation that students reported to us in surveys from last spring. As outlined below, however, Uni encourages teachers to use grades as a formative and supportive form of motivation as much as possible this year.

Uni teachers attended a series of summer workshops in June and August on remote learning tools and strategies, active learning, problem-based learning, and ideas for re-envisioning curriculum and pedagogy in the COVID-19 era. Our teachers have been actively engaged this summer—both collaboratively and individually—in finding ways to offer the best educational experience we can to our students during this exceptional school year.

Students, we hope you will jump into the new year with energy, ready to engage fully and make the most of opportunities you encounter for project-based and problem-based learning, discovering more about your passions and priorities along the way. One enormous challenge remote learning confronts us with is how to re-create the kind of vibrant school community we have at Uni High during our usual in-person times. We have a lot of ideas, but we need your help with this! We encourage you to share your ideas with teachers, counselors, and administrators for how to create an energized, fun, and connected school community while we're all- or mostly-online.

In addition to ideas for a robust online school community, we're also interested in your ideas for transforming school itself. Some Uni teachers and administrators formed a "Reimagining Uni" group this summer, which has been exploring ways this unanticipated situation could be an opportunity to make learning more truly relevant to your future lives and world. This group will continue to meet, dream, and plan as the school year proceeds, and we will be inviting interested students to join that work soon.

PLANS AND POLICIES

Much of our plan for school during 2020-21 is outlined in [The Health and Safety Task Force Recommendations and 2020/2021 Contingency Plan](#). We thank the members of the H&S Task Force for their hard work and dedication. All of our plans and policies are subject to revision as we monitor evolving public health situations and the needs of our students. **Safety has been and will continue to be of utmost importance in all of our planning during the COVID-19 crisis.**

Some Terminology

- *Synchronous*—Simultaneous, or happening at the same time; for our purposes, it refers to meetings or activities that happen “live,” when the whole class or group is together, working at once
- *Asynchronous*—Not happening at the same time; students work on an assignment or activity at a time they choose, whether individually or as part of a group
- *Formative*—Contributing to the formation or development of student learning, rather than primarily to the evaluation of student achievement. **Formative assessment** provides ongoing feedback with the goal of helping students to improve their learning over the course of a unit. (By contrast, **summative assessment** evaluates student learning at the end of a unit by comparing it against some standard).

Expectations for synchronous teaching and learning

Uni expects students to attend all synchronous class sessions (unless they are sick or have an unavoidable conflict), and to actively participate in discussions, group work, and other activities. Students will be able to demonstrate their level of engagement in a number of different ways. Students, if you find yourself struggling to remain engaged, or having trouble feeling motivated, talk to your teachers, the SSO, Dr. Majerus, or Dr. Radnitzer. Although we’re not all in the same building as we usually would be, our whole faculty and staff are still here for you, and we are happy to help you with ideas for ways to get the most out of your classes and other school experiences.

During this period of remote learning, we require all teachers to engage synchronously and communicate regularly with students both as a class and one-on-one, and we encourage teachers to create opportunities for synchronous engagement with students in small groups. All teachers should have some synchronous connection with students at least once a week, preferably more often. Although this may vary between disciplines and different classes, we recommend at least one hour per week of synchronous teacher-student engagement with the class as a whole. Many teachers will want to create more synchronous student-contact time. This synchronous time does not have to be “Zoom time” (since synchronous work can also happen with other tools, such as Google Docs, other Google Suite tools, YoTeach, etc.), although Zoom will often be the form synchronous class

time takes. Teachers who plan less than two hours of synchronous time with the whole class should be sure to compensate with student-teacher engagement via other means.

Class participation during synchronous learning

- While students are not required to have their video on during the entirety of all Zoom class meetings, they are encouraged to be present via video as much as possible during participation-heavy parts of class. If there are times they can't or don't want to have their video on, students should take advantage of other ways (such as the chat) to participate and engage in synchronous class activities.
- Students, we encourage you to create a "stop video" screen for Zoom that expresses your individuality (whether that be a picture of your face, artwork that you created, a place or image you love, or a picture of your pet) for times you choose not to be or can't be on camera. You might consider changing your Zoom screen name to the name you go by, rather than your formal/full name or net-id. (If there are students with the same first name as you in any of your classes, be sure to add an initial.) You might consider including your preferred pronouns in your screen name.
- We also encourage students to create Zoom backgrounds for times they prefer not to have their personal space on display. Students should choose backgrounds appropriate for class and should avoid switching backgrounds during class in a way that distracts the teacher and/or other students.
- Teachers can encourage but not require students to turn on their video during Zoom classes
- Teachers should encourage class participation and engagement in a variety of ways, and can check on student engagement at random moments during class. For students who don't want to be on-camera on a given day, this engagement-check may take the form of a vocal affirmation on mic, an affirmation in the chat, or some other means of checking-in.

Grading during remote learning and/or hybrid learning

We will use our traditional A–F scale, but with a philosophical shift. Traditional grades are an important motivating tool for students and organizing principle for teachers. We encourage teachers to use grades supportively rather than punitively during the 2020–21 school year. ISBE's "Fall 2020—Learning Recommendations" emphasize that "it is important to keep in mind that students can learn without grades, yet they cannot learn without formative assessment." Formative assessments and detailed, individualized feedback offer more useful information to students than letter grades and serve as a means to connect with and support students, as well as shape and motivate them.

Teachers should give clear assignments that hold students accountable for their learning, but these assignments should be assessed in a primarily formative and supportive manner. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) emphasizes the need for "deep and broad learning in authentic contexts." When quizzes and tests are necessary, Uni teachers should

use these tools as much as possible as formative steps in students' learning progress, rather than rigid high-stakes assessments. We encourage teachers to consider ways that projects, papers, models, lab reports, problem sets, problem-solving exercises, journals, blogs, response logs, concept maps, and other more process-oriented assignments can be used instead of exams and tests.

Teachers will record grades in PowerSchool, and parents and guardians will be able to check in on academic progress on PowerSchool.

Workload policies

According to ISBE, Illinois schools are expected to provide a minimum of 5 hours of total school work (instruction and homework) per day during the 2020-21 school year. Because all student work will happen at home during our all-remote period, we will use the term "asynchronous class work" to cover any work done outside the class windows in our daily schedule. (See the PDF "Uni High Fall 2020 Remote Learning Schedule" for the daily schedule.)

For most classes, teachers should plan at least 4 ½ and no more than 6 hours of total work (synchronous and asynchronous) every week for each of their classes. PE and elective courses may give students no fewer than 3 ½ hours and no more than 6 total hours of work (synchronous and asynchronous) each week.

Attendance expectations

Uni High's attendance expectations will be as they usually are. Students should be in class and/or participating in assigned school activities unless they are ill or have an appointment or other unavoidable conflict. A parent or guardian should call Uni's main office to report an excused absence if a student is ill or has a medical appointment, or if there is a crisis in the family (including the serious illness of a family member). The student will be excused in these cases.

Students will receive attendance credit for being present for synchronous class activities, or else for an asynchronous check-in their teacher arranges. Teachers will record attendance in PowerSchool as usual, and parents or guardians will be able to view student attendance records. The main office will inform parents by email when students are marked absent.

U of I classes

- Uni students will not be permitted to enroll in face-to-face classes at the University of Illinois during the 2020-21 school year
- Uni students will be limited to 9 credit hours of U of I classes.

- Requests for course and/or section changes limited to a maximum of two (2) requests per student

The following statement from Kathy Martensen, Assistant Provost for Educational Programs, provides further explanation for the policies outlined above: “Due to significant fall class schedule modifications necessitated by COVID-19, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign appreciates your understanding that non-degree access to courses is limited this semester. Uni High students will be limited to online UIUC courses only, up to a maximum of nine (9) credit hours for the 2020-2021 school year, and requests for course and/or section changes limited to a maximum of two (2) requests per student. With limitations on availability and the number of change requests, it is particularly important to carefully plan any UIUC enrollment you wish to pursue.”

Recommended Learning Management System and student-teacher/parent-teacher/school-family-student communication

The Uni administration is recommending Compass as the preferred Learning Management System for Uni High for the 2020–21 school year.

Regular communication between teachers and students, and teachers and parents, will be especially important this year. In addition to sharing with students and families a central location for class information and updates, teachers should find ways to communicate and check in frequently with students and offer regular updates to parents. Uni will be reaching out to both students and parents to gather input throughout the year in order to learn, adapt, and improve our remote and hybrid learning plans and strategies as the year goes on. Supporting the mental and emotional well-being of our students will be a primary concern, and we will be sure to solicit input on students’ social-emotional and mental health, as well as their academic concerns.