

UTM Virtual Townhall Questions & Answers

COURSE DELIVERY: WINTER 2021 & BEYOND

In what formats does UTM plan on delivering courses for the Winter 2021 term? Will all key prerequisites offer online options, especially for students who cannot travel to campus for personal, geographic, or health reasons? Has UTM made any decisions about courses for Summer 2021?

Course planning for the Winter 2021 term is currently underway, with all [modes of delivery](#)—in-person, hybrid, online synchronous, online asynchronous—receiving careful consideration. To best serve our community, UTM will create online options for the vast majority of courses, offering select opportunities for in-person instruction to meet key learning outcomes. Meanwhile, UTM will announce course plans for Summer 2021 in the first quarter of next year: we will base our decisions on conditions at that time, guided by the advice of provincial and regional public health authorities.

When will UTM finalize its plans for Winter course delivery? How can students best prepare for the new semester?

UTM will finalize plans for Winter 2021 in the coming weeks, enabling students to view updated course delivery modes in early November. We encourage students to prepare for the upcoming semester in consultation with UTM's expert staff. To discuss strategies for course planning, for example, students may schedule an appointment with an [Academic Advisor](#) in the Office of the Registrar. Likewise, students might also capitalize on the comprehensive resources offered online by the [Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre](#). Now, as always, RGASC will help students develop the tools necessary for ongoing success in all learning forums.

Does UTM plan on offering online courses even after the pandemic's end?

UTM anticipates extending its current array of course delivery options—in-person, hybrid, online synchronous, online asynchronous—until at least the 2021/22 academic year. Some instructors, moreover, have expressed interest in continuing their online teaching on a more consistent basis and plan to apply for a delivery change in the official curriculum process. Meanwhile, other instructors have already taught hybrid courses at UTM for several years. Going forward, students can expect online options as part of the university's larger commitment to meeting people where they are. We remain mindful, however, of the transformative power of in-person instruction and will always seek opportunities to connect students directly with our world-class faculty.

FEES & FINANCES

What changes has UTM made to its structure for incidental fees? Does UTM intend on waiving some incidental fees in future semesters? What steps has UTM taken to support students facing financial strain during the pandemic? If students can't afford a laptop with stable Wi-Fi, how does UTM ensure successful participation in online courses?

In light of the pandemic, UTM reduced non-academic incidental fees for the Fall 2020 semester: the UTM Athletics Fee decreased by 25 per cent; the KPE Sports & Rec Fee by 30 per cent; the Hart House Fee by 20 per cent; the Student Services Fee by 35 per cent. Later this Fall, UTM will evaluate similar reductions for the Winter 2021 semester as well.

Meanwhile, U of T has created targeted grants—totalling more than \$6.5 million—to reduce the financial strain associated with COVID-19. A comprehensive list of opportunities appears on our [Funding Directory](#), which describes awards available for both undergraduate and graduate students, both domestic and international. The COVID-19 Emergency Undergraduate Grant and the School for Graduate Studies Emergency Grant, for example, aim to provide immediate financial relief amid unanticipated circumstances.

In response to new technological costs, moreover, UTM has approved department-specific grants to enable student participation in online learning. In Theatre and Drama Studies, for example, students can apply for an [Internet Grant](#) to help alleviate the potentially prohibitive expense of highspeed Wi-Fi access. These timely resources supplement existing programs, such as [University of Toronto Financial Aid \(UTAPS\)](#), which continue to provide their customary support.

To learn more about additional funding opportunities available, we encourage students to schedule an appointment with a [Financial Aid Advisor](#) in UTM's Office of the Registrar.

Does the provision of COVID-related emergency funds signal a larger institutional commitment to making UTM more affordable for low-income students?

U of T's [Policy on Student Financial Support](#) has long operated on a principle of inclusivity: "No student offered admission to a program at the University of Toronto should be unable to enter or complete the program due to lack of financial means." Accordingly, U of T provides a level of financial support that exceeds provincial benchmarks, offered in part through the [University of Toronto Financial Aid \(UTAPS\)](#) Program. Meanwhile, for international students in particular, the university has recently created several new funding opportunities. The [Lester B. Pearson International Student Scholarships](#), for example, signal U of T's ongoing commitment to diversity of recruitment and equity of access.

We intend to do more in the future. Most immediately, we look forward to constructing a meaningful response to UTMSU's [Education for All](#) Campaign. In describing new initiatives, our response will develop a more capacious definition of excellence, one that encompasses not only

academic achievement but personal resiliency. UTM will explore new options for scholarships and supports accordingly, to best put that expanded definition in practice.

What assistance has UTM provided to instructors to cover technology costs for online teaching?

To support the transition into online learning environments, our team in Information & Instructional Technology (I&ITS) consulted closely with departments throughout the summer. After discussing departmental needs for new software and equipment, I&ITS purchased “instructor packs,” each of which includes a webcam, a document camera, and a headset. Departments loan the packs to individual faculty who don’t have the same technology at home. To purchase additional technology, departments may draw on their own budgets; faculty may use their professional expense reimbursement allowance. We anticipate following a similar process in preparation for the Winter term. Then, as now, [I&ITS](#) will continue assembling the resources to help our community teach, learn, and work anywhere.

COMMUNITY WELLNESS & ACCESSIBLE LEARNING

How does UTM plan on supporting physical and mental health amid the pandemic's isolation?

Since March, UTM has anticipated the pandemic's impact on physical and mental wellness, creating new opportunities for unity and camaraderie, activity and support. Our essential student services have continued uninterrupted, now in virtual forums. The [Health and Counselling Centre](#), for example, offers—and will keep offering!—online sessions for one-on-one and group care. [My SSP](#) still provides counselling, conversation, and support 24/7, in a variety of languages, through an app and toll free number: 1-844-451-9700 inside North America; 001-416-380-6578 outside North America. HCC has also launched additional virtual programs in resiliency, self-care, and stress management through the new [Wellness at Home](#) initiative.

The [Department of Recreation, Athletics, and Wellness](#) has developed similarly innovative strategies to support physical fitness virtually. Our #MoveUTM campaign opens a suite of activities on Instagram and Zoom, enabling students, librarians, faculty, and staff to develop their own workout routines at home. Concurrently, we welcome our communities to make virtual appointments with UTM's personal trainers; to participate in our first ever e-sports league; and to enrol in a wide array of online fitness classes. In the coming months, we look forward to strengthening our programming further still, launching more wellness initiatives in the Winter.

How does mental health factor into university decisions about course delivery?

We recognize that in-person classes play an important role in providing students, faculty, staff, and librarians a mental reprieve. We base course delivery decisions on the advice of pedagogical experts and public health authorities, which keep both physical and mental wellness in mind. Current conditions make it impossible to hold in-person courses as usual. But a variety of mental health services remain available to support our community in this challenging time.

For ease of access, the Office of Student Affairs has organized these services on a new [Mental Health Website](#). It will assist our community—wherever its members now live—to find appropriate wellness resources and connect with meaningful forms of support. The page will update regularly as our programs continue to adapt and grow. Concurrently, we encourage U of T employees to access tricampus services through the Office of Human Resources & Equity, such as the [Wellness and Work From Home Toolkit](#), the [Support and Advice Page](#), and the [Wellness Calendar](#).

What steps has UTM taken to accommodate disabled students in online learning environments?

UTM has—to our collective good fortune!—hired a permanent Educational Developer at the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre: [Ann Gagné](#), expert in innovative curricular design and accessible pedagogy. Drawing on her experience in evidence-based teaching strategies, Dr. Gagné has played an instrumental role throughout the pandemic, helping instructors implement best

practices for inclusive and accessible learning online. Concurrently, [UTM Accessibility Services](#) will continue developing new tools for both instructors and students to thrive in virtual learning environments. Now, as always, the accessibility team will support students with academic accommodations, working diligently to enable success in any course, online or in-person.

Will the university—either in the pandemic or in the future—provide scholarships and financial supports designed specifically for students with disabilities?

OSAP has built into its system financial supports precisely for this purpose, such as the Canada Student Grant for Persons with Permanent Disabilities and the Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities. To facilitate student applications, U of T's team in [Financial Services](#) has outlined the process in detail. The university likewise supports students with disabilities on the basis of financial need. Opportunities here include the [University of Toronto Award for Students with Disabilities](#), the [Abdul Razak and Sofia Naik Award](#), and the [Dr. Albert Strickler Scholarship](#). Again, we encourage students to schedule an appointment with a [Financial Aid Advisor](#) to learn more about the opportunities available.

COURSE PROTOCOL

How do UTM instructors accommodate students living in different time zones?

Dedicated to teaching you where you are, UTM's instructors will consider relevant accommodations on a case-by-case basis. For students living outside EST, for example, instructors may reschedule assessments at a more convenient time of day. They may also organize asynchronous activities, enabling students to learn at their own pace. For other possible solutions, we encourage students to contact their instructors directly, as well as the undergraduate advisors in their academic units.

What protocols does UTM have in place for students who are grieving the illness or death of a loved one and who may need extensions on their work?

In our commitment to inclusive excellence, UTM operates under a series of rules and regulations intended to ensure that all students are treated equitably and fairly. We know, however, that students often have valid reasons—especially now—to receive an exception from these rules. UTM will consider extension requests carefully, on a case-by-case basis, remaining mindful that many students have experienced challenges beyond their power to foresee or control. We encourage students to submit an [Extenuating Circumstances Form](#) to their academic unit and to follow their instructor's policies in declaring an absence. We also encourage students to connect with the [Registrar's Office](#) to best manage appropriate documentation for [petition](#) requests.

How can the university ensure that people don't take advantage of lenient deadlines and test deferrals? How does the University uphold academic standards in the online environment?

The vast majority of students continue to pursue their education with honesty, determination, and integrity, acutely aware that requesting unnecessary academic accommodations will not provide a long-term advantage: academic integrity is integral to academic success. Accordingly, UTM aims to provide students the tools necessary to best organize their academic workload. The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre, for instance, offers a [range of resources](#) for study planning, time management, and assignment completion.

For instructors, meanwhile, UTM provides similarly comprehensive resources to uphold academic standards in online classrooms. The Office of the Vice-Principal Academic & Dean has advanced a series of [actionable insights](#) about syllabus design, online assessment, exam software, and classroom management, all of which support academic integrity amid remote learning. U of T's Centre for [Teaching Support & Innovation](#) has compiled comparable tips, tactics, and technologies, describing best practices to ensure academic integrity in, for example, an e-proctored exam. These resources complement outstanding work at UTM's [Teaching and Learning Collaboration](#), which has focused on building classroom communities and upholding academic integrity as a shared experience.

RESIDENCE LIFE, TRANSPORTATION, & TRAVEL

What strategies has UTM Residence adopted to support live-in students during the pandemic?

We have prioritized the health, safety, and wellbeing of residence students in several complementary ways, from the arrangement of physical space to the implementation of new engagement activities. To best facilitate social distancing, UTM has provided all 2020/21 residents with single-occupancy rooms, reducing concurrently the number of students assigned to a shared bathroom. We have also implemented an enhanced safety strategy across all residence buildings: UTM staff continue to clean frequently and thoroughly; to install hand sanitizing stations and plexiglass barriers; and to promote best health practices with student-facing media.

Meanwhile, residence staff have themselves undertaken health and safety training, honing the skills necessary to best support their community's needs. Our staff have focused equally on building community cohesion, coordinating virtual events that connect students with their residence peers. To help students thrive academically, moreover, we recommend our series of [Residence Support Webinars](#). The webinars span topics from time management to online learning apps, from academic integrity to online test taking, and exemplify our collective commitment to supporting effective learning—anywhere.

What self-isolation protocols has UTM put in place for international students returning to campus in Winter 2021?

To support arriving international students, U of T has developed a comprehensive [quarantine program](#) that provides transportation from the airport; a private residence room; a private bathroom; and three meals per day delivered to the door. Students also receive daily check-ins, supplies and snacks for their quarantine period, and resources for physical and mental wellness. The Government of Ontario requires students arriving from abroad to complete a COVID-19 test during their quarantine period: UTM will arrange this testing accordingly, facilitating the process for students quarantining in our accommodations.

If a student moves out of residence for reasons of health and safety, do they have to continue paying residence fees? Will international students who applied to live in UTM residence in September be held financially responsible, even if they can no longer travel to Canada in person?

We recognize that the pandemic may force students to make difficult choices. So, we aim to afford residence students as much understanding as possible, assessing the terms of contracts and fees on a case-by-case basis. Likewise, we know that international students may have to remain at home through no fault of their own: UTM will refund the residence application fee for students choosing to cancel for some pandemic-specific reasons.

Does the university plan on reinstating the UTM/UTSG Shuttle Bus? In the interim, what measures has UTM put in place to facilitate transportation between the campuses?

In light of the pandemic, we have temporarily suspended shuttle service between UTM and UTSG as well as between UTM and Sheridan. We hope to resume the services as soon as possible. Meanwhile, many public transit and MiWay routes continue to operate successfully, details for which appear on UTM's [Transportation Website](#). Concurrently, UTM has created a new [transit reimbursement policy](#), designed to assist graduate researchers, postdoctoral fellows, and teaching assistants with the cost of reaching UTM in the shuttle's absence.

COVID-19: COMMUNICATIONS & SAFETY RESPONSE

What is COVID-19 contact tracing? How does the university distinguish between close and transient contacts? What forms of evidence do contact tracers use—beyond individual reports—to ensure the process' success?

The tracing process involves identifying, informing, and instructing people who may have come in contact with a known or possible case of COVID-19. At UTM, the process is coordinated by experts in U of T's Office of [Environmental Health and Safety](#) (EHS) in consultation with local public health authorities.

EHS defines contacts according to public health directives, which make the following distinction. A *close contact* has had a prolonged (>15 minutes), unprotected, immediate (<2 metres) connection to a positive or symptomatic person. They may also have had direct exposure to infectious bodily fluids in the form of a cough or sneeze. A *transient contact*, by contrast, usually has had only a brief interaction with a symptomatic or infected person. The definition also encompasses situations of more prolonged exposure when substantial physical distancing (>2m) has been maintained. EHS sends different notifications to close and transient contacts directly, with instructions tailored to the particular case. When assessing individual risk, EHS also analyses other relevant factors, including the ventilation of the space, the cumulative number of potential exposures, and the mitigating effect of masks or face coverings.

EHS practices an abundance of caution in assembling comprehensive information for potential contacts. They use personal accounts of affected individuals, but they draw on many additional forms of evidence as well: video footage, U-Check assessment data, GATs and EATs, T-Card swipes, supervisor shift records, and more. In short, EHS has anticipated and built into their process the possibility that people will not remember everybody they encountered on a particular day: the process can succeed even if individual memory fails.

How many positive cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed at U of T? How can people learn more about case numbers? How frequently does the university update its case data? What sorts of people have been included in the university's case counts?

Case data appears on [U of T's COVID-19 Dashboard](#), which receives updates twice weekly: on Mondays and Thursdays. Since the start of the Fall 2020 semester, as the dashboard indicates, U of T has had 31 confirmed cases of COVID-19 across the tricampus system; UTM has had seven.

The dashboard records information about two different kinds of COVID cases. The first section tracks cases connected to any of the three campuses as physical spaces. It lists the number of positive tests reported by U of T community members who have visited UTM, UTSG, or UTSC in person. The second section, meanwhile, presents the total number of U of T reported cases, regardless of whether the case had any physical connection to a campus itself. The respective criteria for inclusion mean that the numbers of the two sections will not always add up to the

same total. In the dashboard updated on 19 October, for example, the first section lists one case; the second lists two. The difference means that a person in the U of T community reported a positive test result to the university's office of Environmental Health & Safety, even though that person had not been physically present in any university spaces.

The definition of U of T's community encompasses the 100,000+ faculty, staff, students, librarians, and postdocs who work, study, and live at our three campuses. It doesn't include private citizens or independent contractors, such as the folks who work on campus construction projects, to ensure that we don't infringe on safety processes and reporting structures already developed by other institutions. The data for these cases will appear, instead, on comprehensive COVID-19 dashboards, such as that compiled by the experts at [Peel Public Health](#).

For similar reasons, U of T's dashboard does not record data for cases that haven't been disclosed directly to our Occupational Health Nurse. If any member of the U of T community tests positive for COVID-19, they should immediately report the result by email to ehs.occhealth@utoronto.ca. In turn, the university will initiate its robust safety protocols and track the case in the relevant dashboard section.

Why doesn't UTM notify everybody about every case of COVID-19 on campus? What steps has the university taken to ensure transparency and enable people to make informed health decisions? If there is a confirmed or possible case of COVID-19 at a UTM laboratory, how will people find out?

To support the work of public health, and following expert advice, UTM takes great care over community-wide notifications. We don't want to alarm people who are not at risk or send so many messages that people start to "switch off." We want to encourage awareness and adherence to public health safety measures and to encourage testing when it matters most. Above all, we're obliged by law to preserve individual medical confidentiality. To uphold our legal and moral mandates to privacy, we cannot disclose widely any personally identifying details, such as the exact times, locations, and groups associated with cases of COVID-19.

Accordingly, UTM sends a community-wide notification only if a positive or possible case of COVID-19 affects people in multiple facilities, spaces, and units across campus. These notifications do not signal cause for concern or demand special action. They intend to reassure people that all COVID-19 contacts have been traced; that any affected spaces have been cleaned; and that the campus is open and safe.

Meanwhile, if a case of COVID-19 is connected to a smaller area—laboratories included—we will communicate with the relevant department chair(s) and primary investigator(s). Again, unlike EHS's direct messages to close contacts, UTM's notifications do not indicate elevated risk. Rather, they represent another step that we have taken to go above and beyond public health requirements in our commitment to transparency.

If a UTM community member is immunocompromised, or has an existing health condition, should they still come to campus?

We encourage all community members to decide about on-campus activity in consultation with their physicians and families. UTM is working closely with public health authorities to make the campus as safe as possible. We will continue to share proactive safety messaging, reminding folks to maintain social distance, wear a mask, wash their hands frequently, monitor themselves for symptoms, and use our [U-Check](#) assessment portal and Health Canada's COVID-19 [notification app](#).

How does UTM staff conduct proactive cleanings for COVID-19 safety?

As part of our protective measures against COVID-19, UTM's caretakers clean all facilities thoroughly using several different products, each tailored to the particular space. Our staff members mix a chlorine/water solution designed specifically to sanitize washroom stalls, floors, and shower areas. Meanwhile, for tables and chairs in study spaces, meeting areas, and classrooms, our caretakers apply approved commercial products such as Airx 15 and Virox 5RTU. They use the same products to disinfect other high touch surfaces, too: light switches, doorknobs, handrails, elevators buttons. For more sensitive surfaces, such as vending machines, banking and parking machines, keyboards, and electronics, they use Lysol spray and Lysol wipes. Going forward, UTM will continue following recommendations from EHS and public health authorities, adapting our cleaning practices as the science on COVID-19 develops.

In light of their outstanding effort, our caretaking teams deserve the university's highest gratitude. THANK YOU, caretakers, for your dedication, efficiency, and proactive commitment to safety.

How does UTM enforce mask usage on campus?

UTM enforces mask usage through proactive education: an educational approach encourages substantially higher compliance than does a coercive threat of punishment. As part of our educational commitment, UTM leverages various communication channels to publicize peer-reviewed science on the public health benefits of mask usage. Our [multimedia messaging](#) promotes mask wearing as a matter of both individual and collective interest—a way of exercising personal control and fostering communal safety in an otherwise chaotic time. In tandem, UTM has appointed COVID-19 Monitors to encourage mask usage across our campus spaces. The initiative, which has already increased compliance with U of T's [mask policy](#), brings the additional benefit of providing new employment opportunities in a period of economic uncertainty.