

Dear VCSA Satterlund, Dean Moore, and Dean Antony,

Hello from the International Student Advisory Council (ISAC). We are a committee from the International Students & Programs Office (ISPO) that is composed of students from various campus leadership positions dedicated to advocacy for campus-wide issues impacting international students. This includes Associated Students, Graduate & Professional Student Association, College Councils, and student organizations at UC San Diego.

ISAC acknowledges the success of “Return to Learn” and we commend UC San Diego in its efforts to bring students back to campus for Fall 2021. However, while maintaining the success of “Return to Learn,” it is crucial to remember the international student population and how a fully in-person Fall 2021 would disproportionately impact them. ISAC strongly urges that UC San Diego keeps the need of international students in mind and continues remote-learning options for Fall 2021. Below are reasons for our request to keep remote-option for Fall 2021:

Main reasons for why remote-option is needed and the need for better messaging:

1) Embassy/Consulate Closures

Many US embassies and consulates remain closed around the world. At this time, the U.S. Department of State is unable to provide a specific date for when each embassy or consulate will resume routine services. In addition, some embassies and consulates offer emergency appointments only with no definitive dates for return to routine services. Visa processing takes 3 to 5 weeks, and if embassies/consulates do not open early enough, international students will not be able to make it back in time for when Fall 2021 begins. Keeping remote-option courses will allow international students the ability to continue their education even if they are unable to make it back to San Diego in time for Fall 2021.

2) Late Notice of Remote Option for Classes

In the “Fall Instruction Planning Message,” it says that “Beginning July 1, 2021, academic departments, working with the Registrar, will be able to change classroom requests and/or instruction modality for specific courses, as needed to support students impacted by visa or travel restrictions, handle any county/state/CDC restrictions on classroom occupancy, and accommodate specific faculty needs.” However, all classes are scheduled as in-person for now. This signifies that students will not even be able to know what classes will offer an online option until July 1. Course enrollment is in May. If students do not know which classes will offer a remote-option, how will students know what classes to take?

Furthermore, planning the logistics to come back to UC San Diego takes time. Under current uncertainties, travel planning is on hold until there is sufficient information about how classes will operate in Fall 2021. If remote-option ends up not being provided for needed classes, some students will have very little time to plan their travel back to San Diego and find housing. This may delay their arrival and cause them to not make it back in time for when Fall 2021 starts. Therefore, remote-option should be provided for all classes so that international students can continue their coursework and take classes needed for their degree.

3) Strict Mandatory Quarantine in Home Country

Many countries require a period of quarantine at arrival, which can range from two to three weeks. Some countries even require that period of quarantine to be in a hotel. This requirement is indefinite and may be kept in place for the rest of 2021. Winter break is only three weeks. Without remote-option for all classes, students will not be able to go back to their home country

and see family because if they do go back, they would be spending all of their break in quarantine (and possibly be in an isolated hotel room alone). If some Fall 2021 classes do require in-person attendance and even if students do make it back for Fall 2021, there needs to be a remote-option from week 7 to finals week. That way, students can go home before Fall 2021 ends, finish the rest of Fall 2021 remotely, and be out of quarantine by the time winter break begins. It would be cruel to deny international students the opportunity to go home for winter break as it is typically the only holiday long enough in the academic year for them to go home. Not going home for a whole year may affect homesickness, which is linked with depression. Therefore, remote-option for at least part of Fall 2021 is needed so that students can continue their coursework and be able to go home for Winter Break.

4) Pressing Concerns of Unclear Messaging

Many students are interpreting Fall 2021 as fully in-person after reading the “Fall Instruction Planning Message.” If students are assuming this, one can only imagine what faculty are assuming from that message as well. If faculty are interpreting this message as an authorization to make their classes fully in-person, the needs for remote-option will be neglected. What happens if, by July 1, academic departments do not change classroom requests/instruction modality because they believe that Fall is mandated to be fully in-person? The ambiguity in the “Fall Instruction Planning Message” is a concern because it does not emphasize the need to keep remote-option available. There needs to be clear messaging to faculty that there is a need for them to keep remote-options for Fall 2021 and better communication with students that remote-option will be available to subside the stress stemming from this announcement.

Summary

1. Remote-option for Fall 2021 must be kept because:
 - a. International students may not be able to make it back in time for when Fall 2021 begins due to embassy/consulate closures.
 - b. The notice for which classes will provide a remote option is announced after course enrollment, which will cause uncertainty during May course enrollment and delay travel planning.
 - c. Without a remote-option, students are unable to go home for the holidays.
2. The concern about the current situation:
 - a. Ambiguous “Fall Instruction Planning Message” may cause the need for remote-option to be overlooked by faculty.
 - b. This is not accommodating to the needs of international students and hinders their ability to continue their education.
3. Request:
 - a. Send clear messaging to faculty that remote-option is needed.
 - b. Communicate with students that remote-option will be offered.

Thank you for your consideration and continued support.

Best Regards,
International Student Advisory Council (ISAC)
May 17, 2021

APPENDIX

ITEM A: Student Testimonials of Why Remote-Options are Needed for Fall 2021

#1: My concerns are:

- Possible infection risk given some people resisting to get vaccinated, which is their right to do so. I also have doubts about immunity against highly contagious variants.
- Classes have a lot of students, which can cause difficulty in focusing during classes due to the anxiety of the possibility of getting infected
- In case I get infected in the classroom, it will most likely take two weeks to recover, which means I will be behind from the lecture material and might perform badly.
- Possible travel restrictions that could be in place in future given new variants of covid-19 in different countries rising, and not being able to come back on time.
- Finding legitimate housing after July 1st is extremely stressful. I don't feel comfortable living in a shared housing with other people who commute and go to in-person classes everyday by public transportation. Also, living and finding a proper place at La Jolla is much more difficult during covid-19 since I am financially broke.
- If any members of my family get infected given they live in a country that covid is still not under control, it would be extremely difficult for me to be there for them and even cannot travel to see them.

#2: I'm worried that by fall not everyone will be vaccinated. Fall being in person has made me have to look into places to move to in La Jolla.

#3: I am concerned about the health conditions of students. If we returned to the classroom, everyone would be seated together and would be very close to each other. Some new students might not make their trip to the U.S.

#4: If online classes are limited for Fall 2021, with no priority being given to international students residing out of the United States, I will be severely disadvantaged particularly because I am a pre-med student. Without being able to take the necessary courses during my second year my plans on the pre-med path will be delayed heavily and I would have to skip a quarter and not enroll.

#5: Due to issues with embassy closures, students who were matriculated in the class of 2024, for fall of 2020, many students have yet to receive even an interview for their visa application. I have applied for an I20 4 times so far, only for it to be unused since the Embassy is unable to open and operate at any capacity nor provide virtual interviews. Without Fall 2021 remote course instruction I would not be able to continue classes at UCSD for the given term.

#6: Due to the nature of COVID-19 second wave during winter of 2021, as well as the sudden impact of India's covid crisis affecting it's neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, there is still no form of clarification when the embassies will start issuing visas properly. Even if they do, since students from matriculation years of 2020, 2021 as well as those who are renewing their visa will be grouped in the same quota, receiving a visa at limited productive capacity will be severely delayed as well. I hope the student office is also able to take into consideration that rates of vaccination have also slowed down in my country due to the unavailability of any new production by India. In this scenario it also becomes extremely dangerous for me to travel across countries without any proper protection.

#7: The biggest concern I have with a fully in person Fall quarter is the strict mandatory quarantine in home countries. I want to be home for winter break. However, my country requires a 3-week hotel quarantine upon arrival. If I go home after finals, I would be spending all of my break in an isolated hotel room. Furthermore, winter break is the only break long enough in the school year for me to go home. If I can't go home for winter break, I won't see my family for a year.

#8: Because we don't know if there will be remote options for fall, I can't plan my travels right now -- and travel planning takes time. If I buy my plane ticket after July 1, I don't know if I will get a ticket in time for me to come back. Furthermore, flights keep getting cancelled. Even if I manage to get a ticket to come back in the Fall, there is no guarantee that the flight will actually take off due to limited demand for international flights at the moment. I strongly request that UCSD considers offering remote options for Fall 2021, or at least for part of the quarter. If the last 3 weeks of the quarter can be done remotely, it would allow me and other international students to go home for winter break.

#9: Given all these risks of infection and uncertainties regarding announcements, along with regulations, if I cannot make it back in time to take the classes I need to graduate on time, it will affect my academic career, financial status and my mental health.

#10: My family lives in a country where Covid cases are surging and many are not vaccinated yet; therefore, in case they get infected, I would like to be with them and support them since they are considered in a high-risk and vulnerable group and have underlying health conditions.

ITEM B: Endorsements

Associated Students of University of California San Diego
University Centers Advisory Board
Chinese Students and Scholars Association
Chinese Union