



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Information

Faculty of Arts

iSchool Student Townhall

Location: Zoom Virtual Meeting

Date: February 12, 2021 from 2:30 – 3:30PM

Number in Attendance: 54, Diana Wang (Minute Taker)

Introductions:

Erik: Welcome, I'm the director of the School of Information. I'm speaking from downtown Vancouver which is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh people.

Welcome to the town hall. This is *your* session and *your* hour to ask questions. We will address the current situation at the School, which is still closed due to the COVID-19 emergency. We may not know all the answers and not much has changed since we last met in December. Classes will continue to be taught online through current Winter term 2 and into the upcoming Summer terms. If there are things I had already specifically discussed, you can ask more questions if you need clarification on anything. Please speak up. Lisa Nathan (Graduate Advisor), Charlene McCombs (Administrator), and Kevin Day (Educational Services Manager) are also able to address any questions that you may have, to the best of our abilities.

First of all, thank you all for filling out the student survey. 96 students completed the survey and it was really useful. Some things have remained challenging due to Covid-19. However, I was pleased to see that your overall experience for online teaching has somewhat improved, which is positive. As a school, we put a lot of effort into making a safe and excellent teaching experience for you all. I also acknowledge that some things are not fully optimal yet. I've learned lots of points that are of importance to you and your learning experience and I have also noted areas we can improve on. Some people find the learning experience online has been equally or more satisfactory than in person learning. Some of you discovered new ways of learning, which, again, is positive.

The survey noted that LASSA has also been very helpful in keeping everybody socially connected which we are thankful for. There is also a wellness workshop series that the school has organized for iSchool students. The UBC Student Health & Well Being team will host a series of wellness workshops with the goal to help connect with your classmates and provide some resources. There are 3 sessions planned.

URL: <https://ischool.ubc.ca/2021/02/wellness-workshop-series/>

The summer courses will be held online, and the campus will likely remain closed during this time. The specifics of UBC determining that Summer is online are directly related to the guidelines provided by the Provincial Health Authorities.

The iSchool's tentative summer schedule is now posted online. The syllabi have not been added yet but you can see when and where (online) the courses will take place.

URL: <https://ischool.ubc.ca/programs/courses/timetables/timetable-2021-summer-session/?login?login>



UBC has not yet decided what the mode of teaching will be in the Fall. We have been advised as academic units to start thinking of different options. As time goes on, there will likely be more compositions of what we can and should do. The decision will depend on the guidelines from the Province and on the vaccination timetable. We are aware this is a challenging time and that not hearing a definite answer at the moment can be disappointing.

Questions & Answers:

1. Will we be notified of the official decision in May/June then?

Erik: Yes. And I will say that it will most likely be decided well before May.

2. Last spring when COVID was still an emerging crisis, the iSchool sent out an email in which faculty members identified ways that students could collaborate with them on directed research or study. Are there any plans to institute this as a normal practice?

Erik: Directed studies are a normal practice, and you are encouraged to contact faculty members if you are interested in a specific topic with them. I think in the beginning when we were in this emergency, we coordinated by soliciting topics from faculty members; we could potentially do that again and I will make a note to follow up on that. If you are interested in a certain topic, see which faculty member fits best with that, and contact this person with your ideas. Define what you roughly want, what area it is, and who fits best with that subject.

3. For students who have to reside outside of Canada for one reason or another during this pandemic, employment opportunities through WorkLearn and many other funding sources are inaccessible. As crisis conditions continue, many are losing the opportunity to gain much-needed work experiences. Are there any compensated work experiences at UBC or with community partners that students can do from outside of the country? Are there other ways for the iSchool to support international students in gaining work experience, for example through alumni networks?

Kevin: Employment outside Canada is challenging, with issues relating to WorkSafeBC and Canadian taxation rules. It would be a good idea to look at the job log online or contact myself to explore other options.

In terms of alumni opportunities, we sent out invitations for the students to join the UBC platform 10,000 coffees. That is an opportunity for you to get in touch with alumni and our most recent grads. You can connect directly with an alumnus here.

URL: <https://ubclassa.wordpress.com/mentorship/>

Anita Fata (LASSA co-President): Please reach out to LASSA if you would like more mentorship opportunities and events and we can find a way to support you.

Lisa: Faculty often post opportunities in the Digest (in addition to the process Kevin has recommended).

4. For students who've started online, or nearing graduation and have left the Vancouver area), what actions will be taken to support students that need or want to complete their



final classes online. For example, a student who has left Vancouver but has 2 classes left in winter 2021 and doesn't want to move back to Vancouver to attend those final classes.

Erik: The school will work with students who are not in Vancouver to complete their remaining courses online. There is a considerable chance, however, that our teaching will remain online in the fall (Winter 1), in which case this problem would, in a sense, be solved. I recognize, however, that real issues emerge if all teaching will again happen on campus, while a lot of students are still out of province or the country.

5. Will the decision about online classes be made for both winter terms in May, or just winter term 1?

Erik: Currently only Winter Term 1. My inclination is to not wait until the middle of May but to decide earlier, and plans are being worked on currently to gather faculty input on how to move forward on this. The school is actively involved in trying to find the best solution and to make that decision as soon as we can.

Tess Prendergast: I monitor the vaccine rollout very carefully, and doing the simple math, I may just be vaccinated in September, but will be much later for younger people. If there are no hold-ups with vaccine supply, I think we will be looking good for this time next year.

Erik: The communication from UBC that went out to all of the units, mentioned that the best-case scenario is that the end of September will see a sufficient number of people vaccinated. There is not much chance that the vaccine will be distributed any faster.

6. Will LIBR 514F: Information Visualization and Visual Analytics ever be offered in the Winter Session?

Richard Arias Hernandez: We have a course planned for 2021-2022 in Winter Term 2 schedule.

7. I heard that PhD students are able to reserve work space in the iSchool, is it possible for MLIS/MAS students to reserve space or computer to work?

Charlene: There are no students in our school, but you can book a study space in Irving K. Barber:

URL: <https://ikblc.ubc.ca/spaces/book-a-study-space/?login>

Charlene: The school is a very restricted space at the moment, and can only allow 6 faculty members to work in their office.

Erik: We have very strict rules with the booking systems to ensure the safety of our faculty members.

Charlene: I want to draw your attention to faculty office hours which are available online on our AIR site.

URL: <https://lais.air.arts.ubc.ca/students/faculty-virtual-office-hours/>



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8. When will the Winter class offerings be available students?

Kevin: The actual date for when the Winter courses will be announced is June 1st, 2021. You will receive a notification from UBC to notify you about course registration.

Erik: The school's Minor in Informatics has passed the last hurdle which is the approval of the Ministry. We are very excited to be starting in Winter Term 1, when we will offer 3 undergraduate courses. This is an important and exciting new step for the school.