

August 6, 2020

## Sy Syms: Preparation for the Fall 2020 Semester

[Please also see the [letter from all of the undergraduate deans](#) that was sent on August 6th.]

[Go to updated FAQ](#)

We hope that your summer has been productive and enjoyable!

Throughout the summer, Sy Syms faculty have been tirelessly working to prepare your Fall courses and to significantly increase the sophistication of their online teaching. (Thank you to all of them for their hard work and for tapping their talents to further enhance their teaching effectiveness!) They very much look forward to ramping up those courses with you at the end of August. This document provides you with important details about the Fall semester.

### Online Instruction

As you know, the Fall semester will begin with all courses being taught online. To help provide you with guidance about how your courses will be conducted after the Fall holiday break, we have extensively analyzed every Sy Syms course and section that will be offered next semester. Those analyses took into account the following factors:

- the class size (most centrally, sections too large to be held in existing classrooms while adhering to social-distancing guidelines, which is particularly relevant to Syms given that on average our courses are significantly larger than those in the other YU undergrad schools),
- the faculty ability and preference to teach in person vs. online,
- the percentage of students in each section who indicated in-person vs. remote preferences in the provost's survey from last month, and
- the best pedagogical approach for the specific material.

If any of the factors indicated that a course should be online, that determined the course's status.

We very much look forward to eventually returning to in-person courses with you. For the Fall semester, though, and for all Sy Syms courses on both campuses, **the core mode of teaching will consist of online instruction that mixes asynchronous teaching and live-online teaching**. Also, should there be a second wave during the Fall semester, our having focused on developing and teaching online courses will enable the students to smoothly continue having the best education in any scenario.

Conditions permitting, many of our professors are looking forward to holding optional, socially-distanced **enrichment sessions** with any students who want to attend in person on

campus, and similar enrichment sessions online for students who are not on campus. Your faculty will communicate with you about this once the semester begins. In a survey of the faculty this week, almost 60% expressed enthusiasm or openness to holding such sessions if conditions permit it.

Please note that **each online course will have an important live-online component**, even for courses that otherwise will be asynchronously taught online. For instance, professors may conduct live-online reviews of asynchronous materials to answer any questions you have, may alternate sessions between asynchronous and live-online, or may teach fully live-online while tapping more-sophisticated approaches to engaging students.

**It is therefore your responsibility to be available during each session of each course during its time slot.** As in the past, for many courses attendance is a key element of your learning and will be considered in grading.

**If you will be in a distant time zone that will make this problematic**, please contact Academic Advising ([symsadvising@yu.edu](mailto:symsadvising@yu.edu)) now to explore potential alternatives.

## **Preparing for Fall 2020**

To help you prepare for the semester, please note two important improvements that began last year and will be more evident from the beginning of your Fall courses.

### *Mindset: Workplace Preparation*

The first is the need to shift your preparation mindset in many courses. To provide some context, when I was getting my MBA, what do you think was the easiest week of the semester? It happened to be Finals Week. Why is that?

### **In the workplace, you are expected to come prepared to contribute to every meeting.**

(When your boss asks you for your opinion during a meeting, “Sorry, I didn’t prepare” isn’t usually taken very kindly. :->) Likewise, as business students we were expected to come prepared to contribute to every class by doing our preparation work ahead of time. If you had done that daily preparation throughout the semester, you had a great grasp of the material and were ready for finals. If you had not done daily preparation throughout the semester, there was no way to catch up at that last minute.

(The importance of great preparation was also evident with the giving of the Aseres Hadibros, which we reviewed in last week’s parsha. When the Aseres Hadibros first appear in Parshas Yisro, the Torah spends twice as many pesukim describing the preparation for receiving the Torah as it spends on the actual Aseres Hadibros.)

According to my survey data, on average Sy Syms professors are expecting to conduct 50% of their class sessions “flipped” or asynchronous (with pre-readings or videos to watch before class), with some at more than 75% of their class sessions. This is up significantly from the 25%

of professors who were doing so at the end of the Spring semester. This change will require a mindset shift for you: Rather than coming to class to passively hear what you are supposed to learn, **be ready to prepare before class so you can engage in class, just like you will do in your workplace**. For some courses, this might include the first day of class.

At first, this will seem daunting to you, but it will help you both in the short term (more-enjoyable Finals Weeks!) and in the long term (much stronger workplace preparation and learning). When your professor sets high standards for preparation, please thank her or him for helping you heighten your Day 1 Job Readiness even more than before.

#### *Assessments and Feedback: More Frequent*

At my prior university, we did a survey of students to understand their perspectives on a wide range of pedagogical issues. To me, the most interesting finding was that rather than basing grades on only a midterm and a final, **students preferred instead to have many small assessments** (e.g., daily quizzes, class participation each day).

There are at least two reasons why this is a great practice for professors to adopt in your courses. First, it is consistent with research about how you learn best. Second, daily assessments go hand in hand with the daily preparation mentioned above.

During the coming semester, 60% of Sy Syms professors are planning to use more-frequent, smaller assessments in their courses, and another 35% (many of whom were already doing so) are planning to maintain the same approach to assessment.

Another major factor in your learning is receiving feedback about your performance. A strong majority of Sy Syms professors are planning to provide you with more-frequent feedback than before, which will be facilitated by having more-frequent assessments. This will hopefully complement the Mid-semester Feedback from you to many of your professors last year, opening up more two-way communication between students and faculty.

**I hope this helps set the table for a strong semester for you!**

Dr. Noam Wasserman

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Thank you to Sy Syms Student Council presidents Alexandrie Brody and Adam Baron, and to YSU president Zachary Greenberg, for helping shape this document, for crafting the FAQ below, and for their public service on behalf of our students.

Thank you also to Associate Deans Michael Strauss and Avi Giloni, and to Assistant Dean Debbie Pine, for helping shape this document and so many other things within the school.

## FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

*[Last updated 8/6/20 at 7:15pm ET. Please check back regularly for new questions and answers]*

- If you have further questions about any of the answers below, please contact Academic Advising at [symsadvising@yu.edu](mailto:symsadvising@yu.edu).
- If you have questions about whom to contact within Sy Syms about a variety of issues, please consult the [“Whom to go to” document](#) we introduced last year.

### **NEW: I want to live on campus but my parents don’t want me to if none of my classes are in person. What can we do about it?**

As described in the [letter from all of the undergraduate deans](#), there are compelling reasons to come to campus even with all of your Syms courses online. Among many other great things described in that letter, on both campuses there will be a lot of in-person Torah-course options: nearly half of UTS shiurim are expected to be in person, and many Beren Torah Studies courses may be likewise. The professors in many Sy Syms online courses aspire to hold optional enrichment sessions on campus. In addition, there are expected to be a rich variety of on-campus activities (conditions permitting) from the Office of Student Life, clubs, and other entities. As Dean of Students Dr. Nissel described during the recent Town Halls, Shabbos will be very special on campus, and he has even been getting questions from off-campus students about whether they can come for Shabbos (which would pose challenges).

### **If my class is meeting in person after the holidays, am I required to attend in person, or may I continue the semester online?**

All Sy Syms courses will be conducted online throughout the semester.

### **Do I have to inform anyone at Sy Syms that I will complete the full semester remotely?**

No, because all Sy Syms courses will be conducted online for students who are on-campus or participating remotely.

### **Will Syms events (and clubs) be run in person after Sukkot?**

Conditions permitting, there will be a mix of events both in person and virtually.

### **Why are all Sy Syms courses online?**

The major factors include the sizes of the Syms classes (average class size is significantly higher than in YC and SCW, and large classes cannot be held in person due to spatial-distancing rules), the safety and medical preferences of professors and students as expressed in the provost’s surveys last month, and the fact that many Syms courses are interactive or Socratic (which is hard to accomplish when students are split between in-person

attendees and remote attendees). Taken together, these factors resulted in every course ending up being online. However, a majority of Syms professors are open to or enthusiastic about also holding optional enrichment sessions or activities with you (conditions permitting). They will communicate information about those enrichment sessions after the semester starts.

**I prefer asynchronous classes. May I adjust my schedule to select those classes?**

No Sy Syms course will be fully asynchronous; even those that are mostly asynchronous will feature live-online sessions with faculty to answer questions, conduct reviews of the asynchronous materials, and facilitate other faculty-student interactions. Regarding your schedule, as with any potential schedule adjustments, Syms Academic Advising ([symsadvising@yu.edu](mailto:symsadvising@yu.edu)) would welcome a conversation to help explore possibilities with you.

**If the class is asynchronous, why is its enrollment capped?**

Professors play a central role with teaching any online course. That role is also central with asynchronous instruction, where professors answer questions about what the students read or videos they watched, review the material, and provide individualized support. Where possible, we are raising caps, but are doing so carefully so as to maintain academic excellence.

**How will the face-to-face courses work for students who opt to remain off-campus?**

All Sy Syms courses will be conducted online throughout the semester.

**Is this plan only for the Fall semester, or for the Spring as well?**

Right now, we are working extensively to maximize the educational and social effectiveness of the Fall semester. During that semester, we will also keep close tabs on the conditions in New York City and will adapt our plans accordingly for the following semester, after which we will make sure to communicate it to our students, faculty, and staff.

**How will tests be handled?**

Instructors are being encouraged to give assessments to students earlier in the semester and more frequently, to help students gauge their strengths and weaknesses. As they did in the Spring, faculty are looking closely at the best way to conduct midterms and finals online, adjusting their approaches to maximize academic integrity, and sometimes replacing tests with projects or presentations. In addition, the university is exploring online proctoring software for this semester.

**Will the same P/N options that we had in the spring remain in effect for the fall semester?**

No. For the Fall semester, the university is returning to its long-standing P/N policy.

**Will all classes be recorded and posted on Canvas?**

As with other pedagogical decisions, it is up to each professor to decide whether to record classes. However, where professors believe that student learning will be compromised were students to exclusively watch class recordings instead of joining class live online, they should not do so.

**How can I find out more about the formats that will be used in courses regarding asynchronous vs. synchronous instruction, whether there will be optional enrichment sessions in person or online, and other details?**

Many faculty have already reached out to their students to share specific information about their courses. However, if they haven't yet or you need more information about any of your courses, please reach out to your professors.

**If I am taking an SCW or YC course, how will I know whether it's online or in person?**

Many SCW and YC professors will be communicating directly with their students. However, you can also reach out directly to the professor to ask questions about the course.