



Distance-learning Alternative for Graduate Instruction, Fall 2020

March 25, 2020

The issue

Graduate programs are in the midst of recruiting their 2020-21 admits. A key concern among potential students is their ability to start their education in Fall 2020 given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. One common concern is the ability of campus to hold large in-person classes. A particular concern for international students is that even if the emergency measures are lifted, they will not be able to acquire a student visa that would allow them to enter the United States during fall 2020 (student visas are given on a semester basis; students cannot therefore enter mid-semester).

The distance-learning alternative

To allow graduate programs to instruct students who are not able to be in residence in Fall 2020 for reasons outside their control, we are requesting that programs have the flexibility to temporarily deliver their on-campus courses via distance learning. Such distance learning might be needed to respond to both the direct (e.g., restrictions on campus density) and indirect (e.g., restrictions on travel) consequences of the emergency conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, there cannot be any permanent change to the content of the courses or modality of delivery. The distance-learning alternative is a temporary measure.

The process

Graduate programs that invoke this flexibility will need to submit their plan for providing distance learning instruction to Linda Song, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (lhsong@berkeley.edu), by August 3, 2020. Graduate Division will coordinate reviews of the plans with the relevant academic senate committees. Given the sufficient lead time, programs are expected to describe how they will implement distance learning for off-campus students in detail. Specifically, plans must outline how programs will maintain the quality of instruction and provide comparable mentoring to off-campus students as for on-campus students. Note that this flexibility is limited to graduate instruction (academic and professional masters and PhD) for the Fall 2020 semester. The distance-learning option is only available to students who cannot be in residence due to the direct or indirect impacts of the pandemic.