

## **Classrooms take on a new look for fall semester**

July 27, 2020 1:15 PM Faith Dawson

fdawson@tulane.edu

Tulane is transforming its classrooms into learning environments that adhere to CDC guidelines to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

Over the summer, the Campus Services staff worked on developing a number of classroom upgrades for the fall semester. Classrooms will receive rolling glass screens that will separate the speaker from the first row of seated students, while allowing professors to move about more. These shields are 6 1/2 feet tall and have been tested for visibility and sound clarity.

Campus Services also worked with the Office of University Planning to determine how many students each classroom could safely hold, given that students must be seated at least 6 feet away from one another. Staff members from Campus Services, Environmental Health & Safety, Emergency Preparedness, and University Planning and consultants J.S. Held evaluated each classroom for maximum occupancy, keeping in mind that placement of doorways and chalkboards and other factors all affected the number of students in a room. Once the maximum was determined, decals were affixed to the floor where desks should remain. Room occupancy signage states how many students are allowed in a given class.

University Registrar Colette Raphael said the Registrar's Office staff worked on class times and classroom assignments all summer, as well as communicated with faculty the various technology capabilities of each classroom.

"Since March, the Registrar's Office has worked closely with the Campus Services team planning our fall return to campus," Raphael said, adding that she also relied heavily on the mutual support and guidance of fellow Association of American University colleagues. "Registrars have created new grade modes and systems within weeks and implemented online options for students to choose their grade mode as we did in the spring. We created brand new academic calendars, changed how we record information on transcripts — all while our staff is working remotely. Not even for Katrina were we forced to think as creatively as we are today, working

so closely with other offices on campus toward a common goal.”

Nontraditional teaching spaces have been converted into classrooms as well, such as the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall and Qatar Ballroom in the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life. These spaces, along with the [13 temporary buildings and five teaching facilities](#) that were constructed on university quads, received new technology, furniture such as chairs and desks and/or tables to accommodate comfortable teaching settings.

Because the majority of students will continue to study on campus, in-person classes are being enhanced with technology. Some classes may also have staggered in-person attendance to accommodate all students. Other classes have moved to an online format.

During summer, all classrooms and common areas on the Tulane campuses, including offices, conference rooms and restrooms, were thoroughly cleaned and disinfected by contractors secured by the university.

Special attention was paid to high-touch areas like desks, chairs, elevator buttons and doorknobs. Moreover, these surfaces were inspected afterward in order to detect any biological residue.

Sodexo, the company that staffs the university’s custodial services, had already collaborated with Tulane to switch to a more effective disinfectant and disposable cleaning materials to thoroughly clean and to minimize the possibility of cross-contamination.

Once students and faculty return to campus, Sodexo will maintain a regular daily cleaning schedule of all classroom surfaces. Sodexo custodial staff will employ a simple test — an indicator that disappears when a surface is thoroughly clean — to ensure proper sanitization. Randomly administered spot checks with UV light will further determine how well a surface has been cleaned. Students and faculty members will have access to sanitizing wipes that can be used on surfaces between cleanings.

Campus Services, in consultation with an external certified industrial hygienist, epidemiologists and Tulane’s Office of Environmental Health and Safety, developed detailed protocols for continued cleaning and disinfection in accordance with CDC and Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidance.

Tulane's Information Technology team has worked closely alongside Campus Services and the Registrar's Office this summer to develop and execute a plan to retrofit up to 180 classrooms with enhanced technology to support a mix of in-person and remote learning environments. These new and upgraded classrooms are designed as one of three classroom types: high build, low build or "classroom in a box," with many in the latter two categories. The classroom in a box technology includes a mobile lectern which houses the standalone systems suited to smaller classes or temporary spaces.

Classrooms in both temporary and permanent buildings will be outfitted or retrofitted with a lectern-mounted PC that acts as a teaching station. A high-definition camera aimed at the front of the room along with a wireless lapel microphone for the professor will transmit classes via Zoom. Students will also have access to the room's wireless mics and stands, for easier class participation. Speaker systems will amplify the sound for all attendees. Meanwhile, professors can present their materials with the help of a document camera that emulates a whiteboard, a touch monitor, and a projector and screen.

Some permanent classrooms that already had state of the art technology received miscellaneous upgrades, such as ceiling-mounted microphones and video displays to patch in remote students. The largest classes may also use premium recording equipment and additional cameras.

So that professors may concentrate on teaching, Information Technology has hired student workers for the Classroom Experience Student Squad, which will assist faculty with classroom management, including technology troubleshooting, and with developing online course materials.

"Through the thousands of details we are managing, communicating, and constantly adjusting, there is one constant: We are one Tulane, with a single goal, to bring our students, faculty and staff back to campus," Raphel added.

*Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano and Sally Asher.*