

UCLA's hybrid learning model leaves many Bruins with concerns about fall classes

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Bruins are expressing feelings of uncertainty for fall quarter as UCLA moves into a hybrid learning model of instruction.

Chancellor Gene Block announced in June that UCLA plans to return to mostly in-person instruction in the fall, with around 80% of classes in person. UCLA later announced that large lectures would be primarily online with discussion sections in person.

Although students will be moving back onto the Hill in full capacity, many will be attending some or most of their classes online. Some classes are planning for instruction seemingly with little guidance from UCLA's proposed guidelines.

Nicolette Simoni, a second-year nursing student, said she would be taking a 200-person life sciences lecture this fall that plans to be in person despite its smaller discussions remaining online. Simoni added she was looking forward to her classes – the rest of which are all in person – to have a better environment and support system for studying while on campus this year.

Similar to Simoni, second-year cognitive science student Apurva Shah said he found the way certain classes were being designated for online or in-person instruction confusing. Shah said he is enrolled in a 350-person chemistry class that currently plans to be completely in person this fall, while some of his other classes of 60 people or lab sections of around 20 people

plan to remain online.

Shah said he searched for in-person classes to take during enrollment, but one of his upcoming classes was originally listed as in person and was switched to online in his virtual class planner without prior notice.

Although UCLA has made an effort to communicate with students, some of the information provided could be misleading, such as plans for larger classes to go online and the amount of in-person classes available, he added.

"It just makes you wonder what other facilities and stuff will be closed for future use that they did say would open up," Shah said.

Simoni added she was glad to have in-person classes and understood the university's aims to adhere to Los Angeles County guidelines, but she hoped UCLA would stay in communication about how its guidelines might change to keep students informed.

"I feel like if UCLA just maintains the communication with their students, that's going to get the best reaction, rather than keeping it under wraps," she said. "If we just are able to be heard and able to be seen as students that are thirsting for an education that UCLA provides, ... I feel like everything will just be better."

Some students felt the value of in-person instruction and costs of tuition were beginning to out-

weigh the benefits of remaining online, particularly with the university's plans to continue to enforce public health measures.

Eric Coestad, a first-year political science student, expressed frustration with the university's plans to keep instruction partially online despite universitywide vaccine and mask mandates.

Coestad said he specifically searched for in-person classes as he enrolled, hoping for a traditional college experience as well as better focus and socialization with classmates and instructors, but he will still be attending one online class that fit into his schedule with in-person discussions in the fall.

"I do think that it should be 100% in person," Coestad said. "I think California is one of the only states that is ... not appreciating the value of face-to-face instruction, ... UCLA and a lot of other universities in California included."

Coestad added that he fully supports public health precautions, but with weekly testing as well as vaccine and mask mandates in place, he feels it is safe enough to bring back the in-person college experience he signed up for.

Isabelle Sandbank, a third-year linguistics student, said she currently has one class planned to be in person in fall 2021 and may need to swap it with an online course more applicable to her major. Sandbank hopes the next quarter will be in person

so she can feel as though she's getting her money's worth, she added.

Many students felt optimistic about being on campus despite continuing online learning, although the delta variant remained a pressing concern.

Christopher Ramirez, a history doctoral student, said all his classes consisting of smaller seminars are currently scheduled to be in person. Ramirez, who recently attended UCLA for his master's degree and worked as a teaching assistant, added that being back in person would increase his enjoyment of going to class and perhaps instructors' as well.

"I feel like there's some kind of a bit of a disconnect between online, and sometimes we don't even have our cameras on," he said. "A lot of it has to do with the whole being detached from other people, being isolated. ... I generally think that, oftentimes, students are not always as motivated to participate when it's on Zoom."

Although she looks forward to having her first college in-person class experience soon, Sandbank said she was staying positive that she is at least staying in the dorms and will be able to settle into the university without worrying about adjusting to a transition from online to in-person classes.

Mateo Umaguig, a third-year statistics student, said he was looking forward to returning to his studies and social life on

campus since he began attending university from home after the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools online in the spring of his first year.

However, he said he's remaining cautious because new developments such as the delta variant could quickly move life online again, adding that if classes were to go online again, he would consider taking a gap quarter or becoming a part-time student.

"I am pretty worried about (the variants). I am approaching this with cautious optimism, but ... I'm kind of just preparing and bracing myself if it's going to be online," Umaguig said. "I am just sick of sitting at my desk and watching a small person at the top right of my screen explain mass."

Sandbank added that while she was worried the rest of her college experience could be online, she remained hopeful that she would be able to create professor and student relationships this year and have the college experience her parents had before her.

"I just want things to be normal," she said. "That's the hardest thing, and it's not something that we can all really get right now. So the sooner that things can be back to normal, the sooner that classes can be in person, the happier I'll be."

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