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## Campus-wide effort prepares University of Lethbridge for onset of new-look Fall 2020 semester

The way in which the University of Lethbridge will deliver its courses may be new, but as the Fall 2020 Semester begins this week, students can expect the same high-quality learning experience from one of Canada's top-rated universities.

When classes open on Wednesday, Sept. 9, the majority of course delivery will be via an online format. Anticipating this would be the case, the University made the decision in late May to commit to providing the most complete online experience as possible to students and used the summer months to prepare.



“I’m proud of how our units from across campus have come together and collaboratively worked to support our faculty members so that they can be in the best position to present a great experience to our students,” says U of L President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Mike Mahon.

The Teaching Centre played a big role in preparing faculty members for the challenge of online courses, designing a number of tutorials and webinars aimed at enhancing online engagement. The Fit for Online: An Online Teaching Bootcamp, gave faculty members advanced strategies for teaching and student learning online, addressing issues such as how to build community and create student engagement, designing assessments and facilitating online learning.

“We also created and continue to offer a number of Shoptalk workshops on online teaching and learning,” says David Hinger, executive director of the Teaching Centre. “Our faculty members have really come together to support one another as we make this shift. Many created videos and FAQs for their colleagues and others have hosted

Community of Practice Zoom sessions that cover everything from online assessment strategies to how to teach large classes or social sciences and humanities courses online, for example.”

For students, undergraduate and graduate, there is no denying the U of L experience will differ from what was before, but every effort has been made to ensure they still feel connected to the University community.

“We’ve worked hard to create an online experience that will give our students the academic rigour they expect from a U of L education, as well as the personal and supportive relationship with their instructors,” says Dr. Erasmus Okine, provost and vice-president (academic). “There are new platforms that allow our students to connect with their professors and with one another. It’s important to feel that connectedness, something that has been a hallmark of a U of L education and something that will remain.”

That means finding new ways to offer the valuable support systems that nurture students throughout their academic journey.

“Student Affairs and many other teams across the University have worked together to ensure students will continue to benefit from a full range of top-quality support services, including counselling, health services, study spaces, tutors and learning strategy support, and more,” says Kathleen Massey, the associate vice-president (students). “Some supports will be offered exclusively online and others will be offered both in-person and virtually. As well, online learning strategy sessions have been offered to students throughout the summer to help prepare them for online courses this fall.”

The University realized a robust participation rate in its virtual New Student Orientation sessions, and had excellent uptake from students for its preparatory academic advising Zoom sessions.

Meanwhile, the University’s Information Technology Services team was busy transitioning the Moodle learning management system to new hosting in the Alberta Learning Management Cloud. Moving Moodle to the cloud will improve the student experience by making this important service more robust, resilient and responsive to the increased demand online learning will create. Participation in this consortium of Alberta post-secondary institutions, backed by Amazon Web Services (AWS) which powers some of the largest sites on the Internet including Netflix and Amazon.com, also supports improved collaboration and efficiencies of scale within Alberta post-secondary which is critical in current fiscal times.

The IT Services team also migrated all students to the Microsoft Office 365 email, calendar and collaboration platform this summer, alongside existing faculty/staff accounts. Having students on the same platform as faculty simplifies collaboration

inside and outside of classes which is especially important in a semester that is being delivery mostly online.

Some in-person and experiential courses will continue in the fall term, everything from laboratory-based science courses to fine arts studio courses and health sciences offerings such as nursing and addictions counselling. As well, nearly 300 students will be living in residence on the Lethbridge campus.

A new phone app, uLethbridge Safe, has been designed as a mobile safety application that provides quick access to numerous services and information for the University community. One of its main features is a COVID-19 daily health check, required for anyone entering campus buildings, as well as a Safe Walk feature that can be used regardless of location.

“It will be different in some respects but the majority of what we do and have always done will still be taking place,” adds Mahon. “Students will still have access to all the supports they have come to know, and we are pushing ahead with new initiatives as well.”

This month will see the launch of Career Bridge: Centre for Work-Integrated Learning and Career Development, a new initiative designed to elevate work-integrated learning opportunities for students.

“First and foremost, with every decision the University has made, the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff has come first. Public health protocols are built into every experience,” adds Mahon. “While it may not look like business as usual, our researchers are still pushing the boundaries with their work, our students will be challenged and rewarded through their class experiences, and the University will continue to be a major contributor to the economic and cultural vibrancy of southern Alberta.”

To view online: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/campus-wide-effort-prepares-university-onset-new-look-fall-2020-semester#.X1ff5dZ7njA>

-- 30 --

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