

Spring 2020 BMI Continuity Information

Information for BMI students

Last updated: March 28, 2020

Dear BMI Students,

Given the abundance of information related to the current crisis, we are summarizing the latest plan for operations in BMI here.

I want to assure you that we will work with each of you to come up with a plan that allows you to conduct research and continue to take classes remotely to the fullest extent possible.

Some of you who are in full-time MS or PhD programs have chosen to leave campus for the immediate period. Please work with the Student Services team as needed, especially if you are planning to take a leave of absence rather than conduct research and take classes remotely.

University Announcements and Guidance - University announcements can be accessed through this website: <https://healthalerts.stanford.edu>. Particularly relevant for you as graduate students is the following: <https://healthalerts.stanford.edu/covid-19-information-and-resources/information-for-students/information-for-graduate-students-and-postdocs/>

Communication - When possible please communicate electronically. Requests to the staff such as ordering, equipment service or other administrative tasks can be made via email or slack. Our Stanford phone numbers also continue to be operational as listed in <https://stanfordwho.stanford.edu>. We also can do 1on1 zoom videoconference with you.

Meetings

For the immediate future we will be postponing all of our in-person meetings and social activities. All meetings (including lab meetings) should be conducted remotely.

Thesis Meetings and Defenses

Thesis Committee Meetings should be conducted remotely.

For Thesis Defenses we will continue with the seminar portion, but the presentation will be conducted using videoconference (Zoom) so that the presenter and audience can all view the thesis presentation. University policy that states that the PhD candidate, principal dissertation advisor, and out-of-department chair must be physically present during the defense have been temporarily suspended. If your defense is coming up, please discuss with Jaap on the specific logistics for setting up the zoom meetings.

Courses – Spring courses will start virtually and will be conducted remotely according to the guidelines set out by the Provost. **All BMI (and all core and elective courses of which we are aware) will start on April 6th (a week later than originally planned).** There was some confusion about the messaging about “except the Graduate School of Business, School of Law, and School of Medicine” – in the SoM this affects only the clinical programs (MD and PA), not courses in PhD and Masters programs, which follow the university calendar. **Spring quarter will still end on time, on June 11.** The decision to not extend spring quarter recognizes the need to not disrupt summer internship plans and/or post-graduation employment for our students. **However, we are making an additional change to ensure that instructors can complete their classes: There will be no traditional final exam period for timed exams.** Rather, instructors will continue teaching to the quarter’s end on June 11, using in-class quizzes and out-of-class assignments throughout the quarter to assess student performance.

We have cancelled BMI 304 (Clinical rotations) as we want to keep people out of clinical environments to the extent possible.

We have also postponed BMI 248/248P (Clinical Trial Design) until a future quarter so we can better align resources to other educational needs.

We are currently planning to proceed with all other courses (including Tuesday Talks) on a 100% remote basis. We will not be having any in-person sessions or serve food until Stanford resumes live classroom sessions.

Unless otherwise noted, courses offered through the Stanford Center for Professional Development (SCPD), for our distance, HCP, and non-degree option students, will continue as planned. Remote instruction is considered an essential service, so those enabling this will continue to be available. We have also maintained all classroom reservations, so instructors can present from the (empty) classroom or from their remote location. As of now, Stanford does not plan to return to classroom instruction during Spring Quarter, and all instruction will be remote.

Grading Policy

As you have no doubt seen, the Faculty Senate voted on a set of academic policies to be put in place for Spring Quarter 2019-2020, in response to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. The most immediately consequence for your courses is that for spring quarter of 2019-20, all university courses will be graded Satisfactory/No Credit, except for those offered by the Graduate School of Business, School of Law and the School of Medicine MD program (i.e., **the S/NC policy does apply to BMI courses**). The Registrar's Office will update the grading basis for each course, a process that may take up to the start of the quarter.

This affects the following BMI curriculum requirements:

Core Biomedical Informatics Courses (9 or more units). These courses should be taken for a grade.

Computer Science, Statistics, Mathematics & Engineering (24 units). Up to 6 units of this portion of the core curriculum may be taken on a Satisfactory/No credit basis.

A cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater to remain in good academic standing.

At least 21 units of formal letter-graded coursework are expected for all MS and PhD candidates

The temporary change in grading policy approved by the faculty senate (presumably) affects only a single quarter, so 10 units for many of our 1st and 2nd year PhD students and MS students; potentially more units for Coterminal MS students, and select electives for PhD students later in the program. In the core curriculum, BMI 212 and 260 and CS 229 will be directly affected this Spring, as well as select electives from our list (<https://med.stanford.edu/bmi/biomedical-informatics-students/electives.html>).

Given that students don't have a choice in the matter, we will make the following exceptions to our normal curriculum requirements:

- Courses taken during Spring 2020 count towards the BMI requirements, even as they will by necessity be taken S/NC
- In the CS/Stats/Math/Engineering portion of the core curriculum, units taken during Spring 2020 do NOT count towards the 6 unit maximum of units taken on a S/NC basis
- This exception applies to the core courses previously planned to be taken by the student during Spring 2020 (e.g., as documented in the

student's flowsheets). Students who due to the extraordinary circumstances need to make significant changes to their flowsheet/plans may propose such changes, with the approval of their advisor, to BMI Student Services and the Executive Director (similar to an expedited waiver process), including the proposed changes and reasons for them.

- Courses taken during Spring 2020 will not be taken into account in cumulative GPA calculations
- If the courses taken on an S/NC basis during Spring 2019-20 put you below the 21-unit minimum of formal letter-graded coursework, please discuss with BMI Student Services and the Executive Director.

Staff

All BMI and DBDS personnel are working from home to the extent possible. Some business continuity, University, research, and administrative activities require a member of the Department be present at Stanford at times, so we will do so on an as-needed basis. but we feel that it is important to take steps to minimize close contact and possible contamination.

Research Activities

In terms of research progress, we ask that you each start composing a plan of what that remote work might look like for you, planning for a time period of at least 4 weeks. Consider activities that are most easily done remotely - e.g., performing data analysis, literature review, modeling, writing manuscripts and/or research proposals, and research design and planning. You should discuss with your Research Adviser, and if necessary we will set up times to meet (virtually) with each of you to discuss and, if necessary, refine your plans.

In terms of regular lab research activities, they will all be remote to the extent possible. For those of you who are in a lab, coordinate with your PI/Research Advisor about the specific plan for that lab.

For students doing research rotations: Please consult with your advisors and program directors to consider how you will proceed. Most informatics research is reasonably well suited to being done remotely. If you were planning to start or pursue a wet lab-based rotation in the spring, please consult with the PI or consider alternative plans. Below are three options for your consideration:

1. Join a lab in which you have already rotated if you are ready to make this choice. In that case, consult your advisor to plan your Spring term, including reading, coursework, and lab work (if any).

2. Plan a computational project with your rotation advisor and conduct research remotely for your third rotation.
3. Consider rotating in the Summer rather than Spring term. In the Spring, you could participate in the group meetings (via video conferencing) of the lab in which you had planned to rotate, and enroll in extra classes. You may also consider participating in group meetings of several labs of interest to inform your plans. You might be able to complete some of your year 2 coursework in the Spring quarter, or you could gain additional skills in critical areas, such as computer science and statistics.

Pandemic-Related Research Response

There a number of specific research activities that have emerged related to Stanford's research surge to fight the pandemic. Some of these have a substantial informatics and data science component. We will reach out as more information becomes available.

Travel

All university-sponsored travel is discontinued until further notice. We encourage anyone who is planning personal travel to [register your trip](#) with the university. This will allow the university to contact you in the event of a major emergency or changing circumstances related to your travel destination. For those on the NLM training grant and BD2K, we anticipate that the Portland meeting will either be a virtual meeting or that it will be postponed. A decision will be forthcoming soon.

Your Wellness; Access to Mental Health Resources

- Stanford Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is dedicated to student emotional health and can be reached 24/7 at 723-3785.
- [Vaden Health Center](#): Vaden Health Center is open for business and ready to support you during this time. Please see [this page here](#) for their service units with information about their current operations.
- The Graduate Life Office (<https://glo.stanford.edu/>) is available during office hours at (650) 736-7078, or 24/7 at (650) 723-8222, pager ID number 25085.
- Faculty, staff, and postdocs can contact the HELP Center at 723-4577.
- Santa Clara County maintains an anonymous crisis line that is available 24 hours, 7 days a week, at 1-800-704-0900 (Mental Health Services).
- SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) Distress Helpline (related to any natural or human-caused disaster) is

accessible 24/7 at 1-800-985-5990 or via text (send TALKWITHUS to 66746; Press 2 for Spanish).

Hygiene: Guidelines for hygiene, self-isolation and prevention have been widely disseminated (<https://healthalerts.stanford.edu/>, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>). Some additional very useful guidelines I received are in the attachment. Each member of the Department should work to minimize interpersonal contact which may impact many of our normal activities as listed below. I also want to remind people to keep communal spaces clean such as the lunchroom and remove any leftover food or dirty dishes from common areas.

Continuing financial support: Many of our graduate students at Stanford are supported by research assistantships, fellowships and teaching assistantships. With the move to online coursework for spring, the potential cancelling of some classes that were planned for spring, and the moving of much of the work of the research enterprise out of the lab to remote work, there have been many questions about whether TA, RA and CA commitments for spring would be honored. **I want to reassure all students that if they were offered support for spring quarter, that support will be forthcoming.** What students need to expect, however, is that they may be assigned to teach courses that are different from their original assignment. Your schools will be communicating with you directly on this. I also want to assure all recipients of graduate fellowships and financial aid in all schools that your fellowships and financial aid for spring quarter will be provided as promised if you are registered as a student.

Emergency Grant-In-Aid Funds Application: Provides up to \$5,000 per year to assist graduate students who experience a financial emergency or unanticipated expenses causing financial hardship.

Graduate Cash Advance option: A cash advance is a University resource available to Graduate students to assist them with expenses before their graduate financial support is posted to their student account and/or TA/RA salary is paid. Graduate students can request an advance in the amount of \$1000, \$2000, or \$3000. The funds will arrive in their bank account generally within 3 business days. Once requested, a Cash Advance charge will be posted to the student's University bill. No interest or fees will be charged and, generally, the Cash Advance is not taxable.

Stanford Financial Aid Office Support Programs: Information on the grad cash advance program, emergency grant-in-aid funds, graduate student aid fund,

and Graduate family grant program.

Tuition: In answer to another question we have received from some students, there will not be tuition discounts for spring quarter. We realize that for many students, there is disappointment that the experience of online instruction will not be the same as the Stanford experience they have come to expect. If a student feels that a spring quarter with online instruction will not meet their expectations, they have the option to take a leave of absence for spring quarter and re-enroll at a later date. We know that this is not the preferred option for anyone, but it is a function of the extraordinary global health situation in which we find ourselves. We hope and intend to return to in-person instruction at the earliest feasible opportunity.

Our leave of absence policy for graduate students is given [here](#). BMI students should consult with Iffat or Jaap if considering a leave, to understand the details of a leave of absence.

Housing contracts: Some graduate students have asked if they can be released from their housing contracts so that they can do their online work remotely in an area where they have family or where the cost of living is less. The rental contracts allow for an early release (see page 20 and 21 of the linked [document](#)). Please contact Jessica Engleson (jingle@stanford.edu 650-725-2810) if you wish to pursue this option.

For graduate students who continue to live on campus, the university will continue heightened cleaning services and limit access to communal spaces in the graduate living quarters. We will also allow students who take a leave of absence for spring quarter to continue to live in the graduate residences through the duration of their contract if they wish to. (This is a one-time exception in these extraordinary circumstances.)

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our community safe.

The BMI Staff and Faculty

Updates:

3/28/2020: Added section on grading policy. Removed expired information on housing contracts