

UCD School of Computer Science
B.Sc. & M.Sc. Programme Delivery 2020/2021 Update
7 September 2020

This document is an update on the UCD School of Computer Science (CS) programme delivery plans for the 2020/2021 academic year.

As notified previously, we plan to deliver a Modern Computer Science Learning Experience that blends on-campus and at-distance teaching and learning. Our plans for on-campus delivery are guided by the public health guidelines in Ireland. Our approach will enable us to provide our students with high quality academic experiences coupled with flexibility in regard to physical presence.

All CS programmes, and almost all CS (COMP) modules, will run in the coming academic year. For students that cannot be present on campus, it will be possible to study all Trimester 1 CS modules at-distance. Students who will be entirely at-distance for the trimester should select the online-only option for their modules when registering. Students are offered full flexibility regarding whether they join us on-campus for all, part or none of Trimester 1. Students that plan to be on-campus for a significant part of the trimester should select one of the in-person options when registering.

Module timetabling will adhere to the UCD schedule. All online-only CS teaching sessions will finish at 10 minutes to the hour, as normal. CS teaching sessions which include an in-classroom cohort will finish at 15 minutes to the hour. Students should vacate the room within 5 minutes. Once the room is empty, the next class may enter. For in-classroom sessions in the CS Building, the earliest that students may enter the Building is 10 minutes before a scheduled class.

Current UCD guidelines require that room capacities be calculated for 1 metre distancing between students wearing masks with a maximum room capacity of 50 people. Most CS modules have 120-140 students. As a result, lecture and lab offerings will be rotated between groups. For example, if 120 students wish to attend in-person, the class will be divided into 3 groups of 40. These groups attend lecture and lab sessions in rotation. So, the first session will be attended by Group A, the second by Group B and so on. The groups which are not scheduled to attend a session in-person will participate online. It may be possible to increase the rotation later in the trimester if we find that on-campus attendance is lower than expected.

Most lectures will be online. Online lectures will either be pre-recorded and posted to the Virtual Learning Environment (e.g. Brightspace) or streamed with interactive discussion (e.g. Virtual Classroom). In-classroom lectures will be streamed or recorded for students that are online, or an equivalent provided.

Tutorials vary between online and in-classroom depending on module. Online tutorials will typically be streamed with interactive discussion. In-classroom tutorials will either be streamed or recorded for students that are online, or an equivalent provided.

Most lab sessions will be offered in-classroom with the groups not scheduled to attend participating online. The most common approach for running the in-classroom labs will be the “supported Internet Café” model. In-classroom students will be seated and participate in the online lab environment (bring headphones with microphones). Some demonstrators will be available in the classroom at “stations”, while others will be available online. Students will virtually queue for in-person demonstrator time and then either discuss online or move to a seat at the station for an in-person discussion. The student and demonstrator will maintain 2 metre distance. Screen sharing will be electronic at all times. Students and demonstrators may not touch one another’s laptops. Some in-classroom lab sessions will involve presentations or talks, again these will be streamed or online alternatives provided.

Some module coordinators will offer in-classroom learning activities. These in-classroom learning activities will run in the timetabled slots. Options include student self-study, Internet Café access to streamed online classes, student-led group work, and demonstrator-led group work.

Some module coordinators will supplement their classes with “online office hours”, e.g. bookable slots in which module coordinators will answer students questions.

A small number of modules (e.g. Final Year Projects) involve one-to-one meetings between a student and their supervisor. These meetings will typically take place remotely. If they are scheduled in-person, 2 metre distancing must be maintained with no sharing of equipment.

Due to the late start to the academic year, the examination period has been compressed. As a result, most modules will rely on continuous assessment coupled with online class tests. A small number of modules may offer in-classroom test with online alternatives.

We have been notified by UCD Registry that some module components must be offered online in the first weeks due to issues in timetabling. This is outside of the School’s control.

As per the Registrar’s email to students, module coordinators will notify students of the arrangements for their modules in the week prior to class re-commencing.

It is important to note that an allocated timetable slot does not indicate that a session will necessarily take place face to face. The room may be used for student self-study.

The Computer Science Support Centre will run online, providing flexible support to all students.

Module delivery will be supported by activities at the stage and programme level. Induction sessions will introduce students to the educational and technology platforms that will be employed to ensure that every student is in a position to fully participate in all programme activities. Social connection is all the more important when learning at-distance. A series of specific events and activities will be organised to foster team working and to allow students to get to know one another. The stage one academic mentoring programme will continue as normal, in an online format. For the BSc programme, there will be weekly

online meetings between the programme director and class representatives to ensure fast responses to any issues arising.

Arrangements for non COMP modules may differ from these plans, students should contact the relevant School or module coordinator.

Even with the shift to alternative modalities, many aspects of the UCD CS learning experience will not change. UCD School of Computer Science module coordinators are world class experts in their fields. Teaching assistants and demonstrators are drawn from the School's international pool of Ph.D. students. UCD educational technology is up-to-date and technical support is responsive. Teaching is exclusively in the English language. UCD qualifications are internationally recognized and the University is a high ranking educational institution.

All students should read and comply with the COVID-19 safety guidelines provided by the University and the Health Service Executive. A School supplement to those guidelines may be provided in due course.

We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 restrictions in the coming period and adjust our delivery plans accordingly. We thank you for your understanding in this regard.

We are very much looking forward to the start of the new academic year. See you (either online or in-person) soon!

The information contained in this document is accurate to the best of our knowledge as of the date above. Due to the dynamic nature of the COVID19 response, planning for the academic year is necessarily subject to change. The School reserves the right to make changes to these programme delivery plans at any time.