

Preparing for the Virtual SAIS-DC Fall 2020 Semester

As you prepare for the fall semester, we wanted to let you know what a few key departments have been up to this summer, and give you a preview of what you can expect from us when the semester begins.

Global Enrollment and Recruitment

With respect to the economy and global pandemic, why is SAIS still a good investment for an incoming student? What kinds of support resources are provided to admitted/incoming students this summer?

SAIS remains the absolute best place to earn a graduate degree in international affairs. Pursuing an advanced degree at any time is an investment in one's future. The current global environment is an especially good time to acquire the skill set and knowledge that will allow you to do your best work and better position you for future career advancement. Our world-class faculty have earned certification to teach online which will help ensure you have a positive experience, whether in-person or virtually. Enrolling at SAIS connects students to a vast network of alumni, relationships with our international student community, influential global alumni, and future employers. There has never been a more important time to study international relations at a graduate school with a proven reputation for producing influential, innovative, and accomplished graduates.

The Office of Global Enrollment and Recruitment is coordinating a number of activities to connect incoming students to the SAIS community and address any questions and concerns incoming students may have about their transition to SAIS. Throughout the summer, incoming students periodically receive a newsletter giving them regular updates on upcoming campus-wide virtual forums and lectures. There is also a series of customized programs specific to incoming students such as a faculty summer lecture series, financial aid and career services Q&A sessions, and virtual social opportunities (i.e.- Zoom happy hours led by current students). Students with curricular related questions are given access to our academic advising team who can counsel on issues ranging from course offerings to the impact of visa restrictions on their student status. The programming will continue up to the start of Orientation in late August.

Academic Affairs

How will you ensure that the remote/virtual experience is still a robust one academically? How are standard course offerings being enhanced for the fall?

All in-person course offerings will also be offered virtually. Remote learning will take two forms: virtual (synchronous) and online (asynchronous). Online courses are carefully pre-designed and pre-produced courses, with the assistance of instructional designers from the SAIS Office of Distance Learning (ODL). Online classes are broken up into weekly modules, consisting of pre-recorded lectures, activities, and assignments housed in the Blackboard (Bb) learning management system. While there are no scheduled class times, Faculty will schedule weekly virtual/live meetings enabling students to interact with classmates and to synthesize the materials reviewed in Bb. These may be recorded for those unable to attend the live weekly sessions. As with in-person courses, assignments and activities have due dates and deadlines and are administered using the learning management system where the entire online course is housed. Students engage with classmates via technology-driven, learner-centric classroom forums and other instructional activities. For fall semester 2020, we have tripled the number of fully online (asynchronous) course offerings.

As for the virtual courses, to ensure a state-of-the-art learning experience, we are investing heavily in training and technology. SAIS is setting up ten media studios, each equipped with technology to enable remote/virtual instruction. These media studios will be available for all faculty to use while teaching remote/virtual classes and also hosting synchronous sessions for fully online courses. Each media studio will be equipped with two large-screen monitors, an interactive pen display (tablet), speakers, microphone, and a webcam. The media studios are also equipped with acoustic panels to minimize ambient noise and echo.

Student Affairs

What kinds of efforts will be made throughout the academic year to foster campus culture, help new and returning students connect with one another, engage with students clubs and organizations? Will students have the same level of support services in a virtual space?

SAIS offers students a unique opportunity to engage in and outside the classroom with students from all around the globe. We have learned throughout this challenging time that technology allows us to remain connected and to create such experiences. While students may be unable to gather around the table in the SAIS cafeteria, the Office of Student Life is committed to creating virtual spaces to maintain community among the student body. Working alongside the SGA, we will create virtual experiences for incoming/continuing students, with a host of student clubs to connect incoming students with others who share their interests, along with informal virtual happy hours to keep students connected. There will be additional programming throughout the year offered through the Office of Student Life, to keep students connected to students across all three campuses. **Note: The Student Services fee of \$450 will not be charged to students for the fall semester.**

The full array of Student Services staff and support systems will be available throughout the academic year. SAIS offers free, confidential resources through the Johns Hopkins Student Assistance Program (JHSAP) to help students manage emotional well-being and life challenges. Clinicians are available to meet with students virtually. In addition, there are a host of other mental health and support resources available through JHU apps and online webinars, to help students manage their overall health and well-being.

Faculty Affairs

What kinds of preparations have faculty made over the last several months to enhance virtual course instruction, find ways to be creative and/or expand their learning of this modality? What kinds of things will faculty do to make this method of learning engaging for students?

Faculty have spent the summer conducting research, updating curricula, and preparing for students to return. They have also taken part in extensive preparation to enhance your virtual learning experience. The SAIS Office of Distance Learning (ODL) created a “Teaching from a Distance” course, which is an online, self-paced course specifically designed and developed for SAIS faculty teaching virtually in Fall 20. Faculty are learning about the best practices in virtual teaching in synchronous and asynchronous formats, as well as the various technology tools available for use in the virtual modality. All faculty will be required to complete this course by August 31st.

This fall, faculty will still maintain regular office hours to assist and advise students. As we continue to move through the implementation of the SAIS change management process (announced earlier this summer), and shift from academic programs to a centralized support staff model, we are also pleased to let you know that a number of individuals who previously supported our academic departments will remain at SAIS in newly created school wide roles, bringing their talents to bear in wider capacities. This will help strengthen our academic and administrative core, providing a more robust and efficient experience for students.