

## Report of the Dean of Faculty and Interim Provost

October 2021

## Executive Summary

1. We have continued our safety protocols from fall 2020 to reduce the risk of the Bulgarian government forcing us online.
2. We are not seeing the same level of commitment to our safety protocols among students as in the previous fall.
3. The Bulgarian government has been willing to exempt organizations in which everyone is vaccinated from its orders. For this reason, I recommend that we consider mandating the vaccine for on-ground students in spring 2022 to protect campus life from the government's COVID-19 restrictions and the threat of the government forcing us online.
4. The Department of Business achieved a rating of 9.45 on a ten-point scale from the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency, the highest in AUBG's history.
5. We hired three US-based faculty to teach online as adjuncts this fall, including two alums.
6. We are offering three OSUN courses this fall.

## Our Fall 2021 Strategy

We have continued with our policies from the previous fall.

This means that students have the option to study online and faculty have the option to teach online. This also means that we continue to have physical distancing in the classroom and mask requirements in the public areas where physical distancing is impossible.

We have empirical evidence from last fall that these protocols effectively prevent the spread of the virus on campus. Our strategy is to keep our safety protocols in place until we have achieved herd immunity on campus, that is, until we have at least 70% of on-ground students vaccinated.

The difference between this fall and last fall is that most faculty are vaccinated, and around half of our students are vaccinated or were infected within the previous six months. We expect vaccination to increase the risk of the virus spreading on campus. Last fall, students were evidently nervous about returning to campus during a deadly pandemic. Consequently, we saw widespread compliance. We are seeing a nonchalant attitude towards our protocols this semester. I would not want to overstate this problem. Most students are following our protocols. However, they are doing so to avoid the penalties for non-compliance, not because they see the need to protect themselves or their colleagues from COVID.

I speculate that there are two reasons for students' nonchalance. The first reason is that vaccinated students do not see the justification to inconvenience themselves in order to protect their colleagues from their colleague's bad choices. A student club noted that our safety protocols exist to *protect the voluntarily unvaccinated*. The keyword here is *voluntarily*. The implication being that our safety protocols exist only to protect students who made the ill-informed decision not to get vaccinated. This statement is a reasonable reading of the situation. After all, we said that we can drop our safety protocols once 70% of on-campus students are vaccinated. However, we do not maintain our safety protocols to protect the voluntarily unvaccinated as such. We do so to protect the campus from being closed by the Bulgarian government if COVID spreads among the on-ground population.



The second reason is that some students believe that adhering to our protocols is pointless because the Bulgarian government will force us online regardless of what we do. A significant number of students chose to be online this fall because they do not expect us to last the semester. Their expectation is reasonable given our last fall experience when the Bulgarian government forced us online with a day's notice (along with all the other Bulgarian universities). So, the attitude of some students is *why bother – let's enjoy life on campus today and move online tomorrow*.

### Going Forward

There are several points that we need to keep in mind going forward.

**COVID-19 is here to stay.** COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. These illnesses are almost impossible to eliminate once they become established in a population. We cannot wait for COVID-19 to be eliminated before returning to regular classes because we cannot expect COVID-19 to be eliminated. We must recognize that the goal of keeping our campus COVID-free is not a practical long-term strategy. Our goal has been to minimize the spread of COVID on campus until most students are vaccinated.

**We are now in a pandemic of the unvaccinated.** I expect everyone to get COVID-19 at some point. We should not be surprised by this. A vaccine is not like a force field that protects a person from getting infected. The point of the vaccine is to train a person's immune system to fight the virus when it enters the body. We are in a pandemic of the unvaccinated because the unvaccinated are at the greatest risk of hospitalization. A vaccinated person may still need to be hospitalized and could even die from COVID. However, this risk is comparable to the risk of being hospitalized or dying from the seasonal flu.

**We should not worry about the number of incidences of COVID on a vaccinated campus.** We should expect the number of COVID-19 cases on campus to increase when we relax our safety protocols. Every year, the seasonal flu spreads through the campus. We should expect the same pattern with COVID. The unchecked spread of COVID on an unvaccinated campus is a problem because COVID poses serious health risks to the unvaccinated. The unchecked spread of COVID in a vaccinated population should not be regarded as of greater concern than the unchecked spread of the seasonal flu.

**The Bulgarian government has demonstrated its willingness to make an exception to its orders for organizations in which 100% of the people are vaccinated.** We need to have 70% of the on-ground students vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. We need to have 100% of on-ground students, faculty, and staff vaccinated to protect regular campus life from the constant threat of being forced online.

The first three points do not justify a vaccine mandate on campus. Our students are adults who are competent to make their own medical choices. I am convinced that students who choose not to get vaccinated make the wrong choice, but it is their risk. I have not seen evidence that unvaccinated students are a risk to the vaccinated students. If anything, the risk is the obverse: The vaccinated students are a risk to the unvaccinated students.

The last point justifies a vaccine mandate.

A vaccine mandate would protect campus life from the Bulgarian government's COVID orders and the threat of the government forcing us online again.

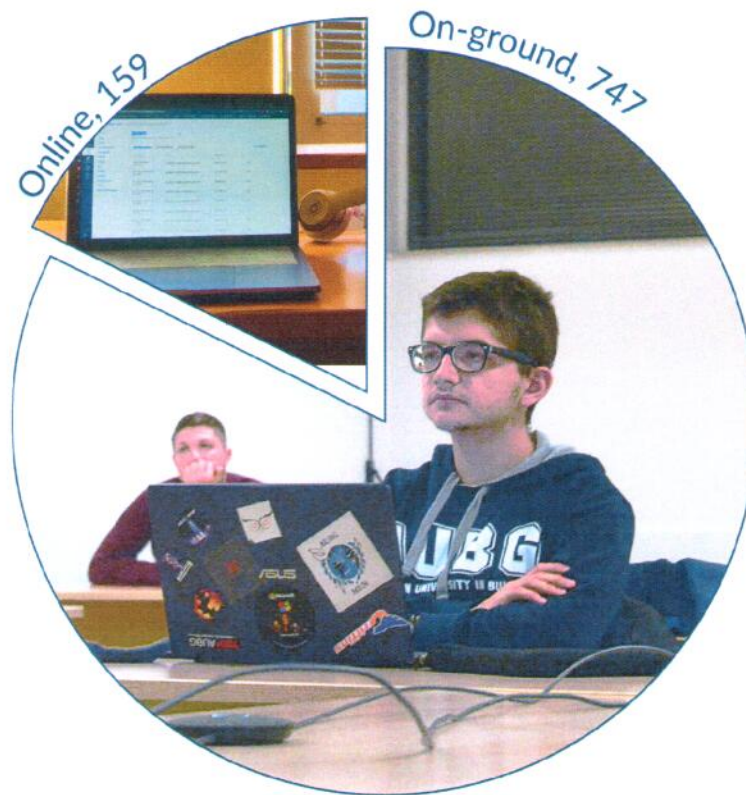
We could not mandate a vaccine in the fall. A vaccine mandate would have meant that students who wanted to be vaccinated and return to campus could not have done so because they did not have access to the vaccine in time for the start of the semester. There was also a question of whether we could have legally imposed such a mandate in the fall.

Now, all on-ground students have ready access to a range of vaccines from our Health Center and can be fully vaccinated by the start of the spring semester.

The leadership team has not decided how to proceed in the spring at the time of writing. My position is that we need to mandate the vaccine for on-ground students and allow those students who do not wish to be vaccinated to study online. So doing would enable us to return to regular campus life in the spring without the threat of being forced online.

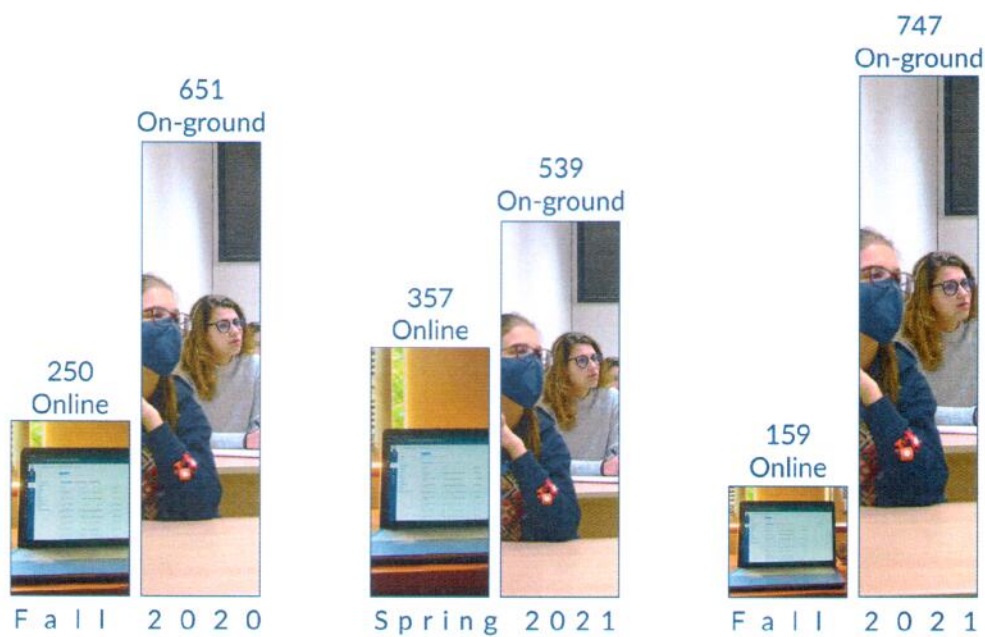
### Students' Study Modes

This graph shows students' study modes as of 17 September 2021:



*Note: In addition, we have 41 students who we classify as "online temporary." These are on-ground students who have been delayed returning to campus, usually because of travel or visa issues. I have not included these students in the above graph.*

This graph compares students' study modes in fall 2021 with students' study modes in fall 2020 and spring 2021:





## Course Modes

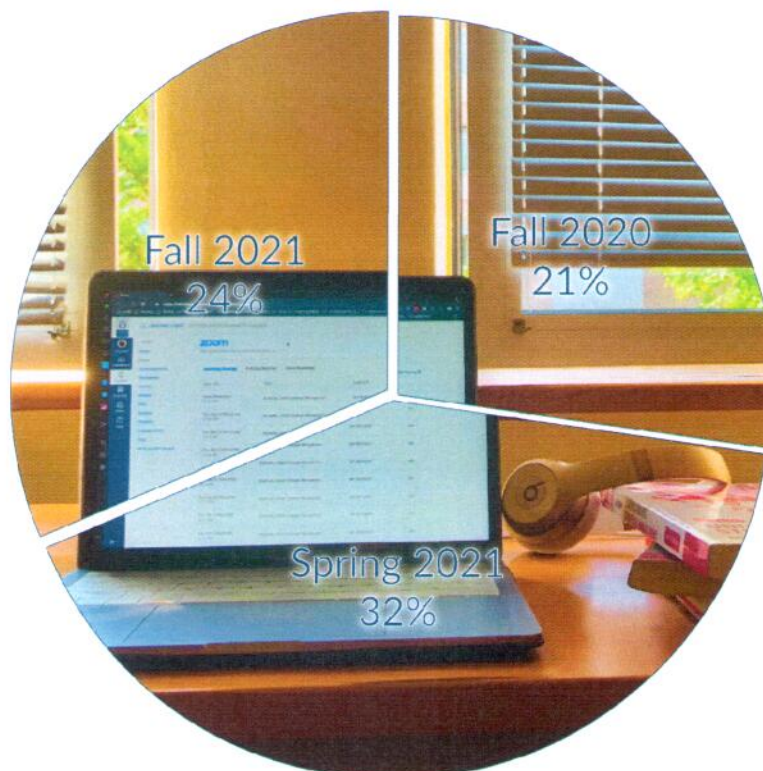
This graph shows course modes as of 17 September 2021:



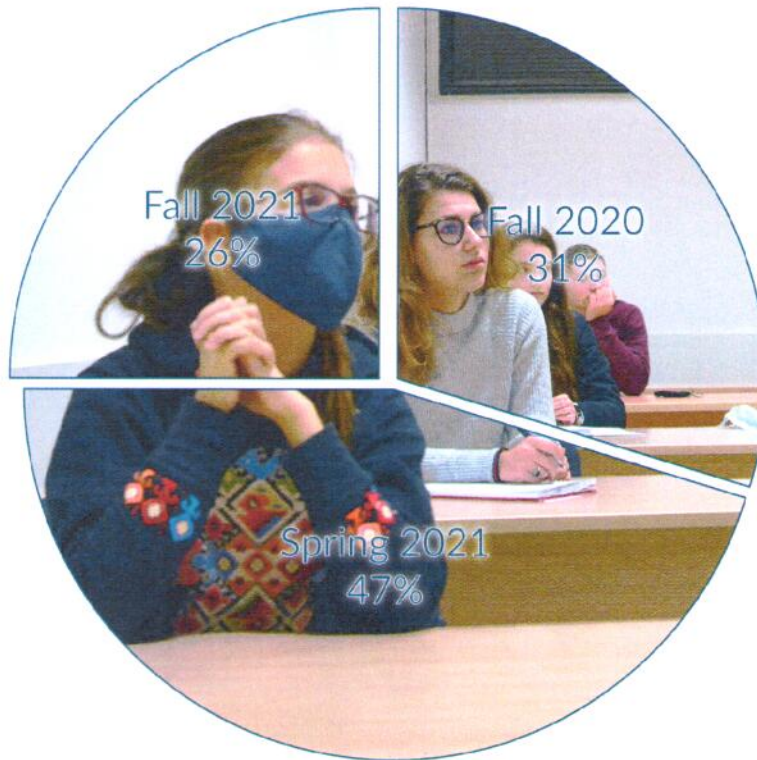
*Note: A couple of "on-ground" courses are currently being taught online because the faculty members are waiting for a work visa before traveling to Bulgaria. Also, we have some "online" courses that could become "on-ground" if the faculty member can travel.*

These graphs compare course modes in fall 2021 with course modes in fall 2020 and spring 2021:

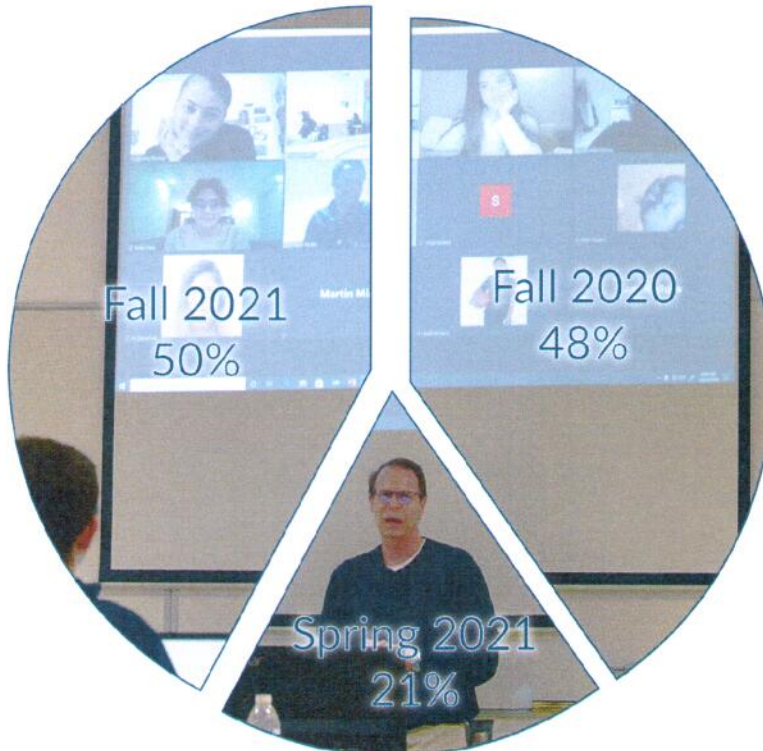
### Online



### On-ground



### Hybrid





*Note: We ended up having to hold all classes online in spring 2022. The above graphs show the composition of classes for spring 2022 had it proceeded as planned.*

We have slightly more online courses in fall 2021 compared with fall 2020 and significantly fewer than in spring 2022. Some of the faculty teaching online in fall 2020 are teaching on the ground in fall 2021. Some of the faculty teaching on the ground in fall 2020 now teach online because of medical reasons (in some cases, not related to COVID) or travel issues.

### **Business Accreditation**

Bulgaria's National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) has granted our business program a grade of 9.45 on a ten-point scale. This result is AUBG's best since the introduction of the system.

### **New Adjunct Faculty**

I would like to introduce you to three new adjunct faculty members. I do not usually introduce new adjunct faculty to the Board unless I think they would be of special interest to you. I am introducing you to these adjunct faculty because we could not have hired them without the option of online classes.

#### **Tarick B. Khadra**

Prof. Khadra is teaching a section of ENG 101 online for us this semester. He was a staff officer in the United States Navy, where he escorted international scientists through conflict zones to aid Afghan farmers. He has a Master of English from the University of North Florida and a Master of International Business and Policy from Georgetown. He previously taught as an English adjunct at Northwest Florida State college and Monterey Peninsula College.

#### **Maria A. Petrova**

Prof. Petrova is teaching a one-credit course in management online for us this semester. She has a B.A. in Business Administration from AUBG. She has an M.A. in Marketing, Advertising, and Public Relations from the University of Sheffield and a Ph.D. in Environmental Science from Oregon State University. She is an Associate Fellow of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University. She is currently the Assistant Director of the Georgetown Environment Initiative at Georgetown University.

#### **Sabri Tahiri**

Prof. Tahiri is teaching a section of Management Information Systems online for us this semester. He has a B.A. in Computer Science from AUBG (Class of 2005). He has a Master of Science in Computer Sciences from The George Washington University, specializing in computer networks and security. He is currently the Senior Program Manager at The World Bank Group in Washington, D.C.

### **OSUN**

#### **Social Entrepreneurship**

We are participating in an OSUN collaboration course this semester on social entrepreneurship. For one class each week, our students meet on campus. For the second class each week, our students work online with OSUN students on other campuses. The course culminates in a "shark tank for sustainability," with the winning team competing at the Bard MBA's annual Disrupt to Sustain pitch competition in December.

#### **Nuclear Energy and Public Policy**

Our own Ed Friedman is teaching a one-credit course that analyzes policy decisions regarding nuclear energy as countries confront the need to reduce carbon emissions. This course is being taught as an AUBG course that is open to OSUN students.

### *Women Write the World*

The JMC Department opened this OSUN course on contemporary women writers to its students. Prof. Jennifer Browdy, Professor of Comparative Literature and Media Arts at Bard College at Simon's Rock, teaches this course. Though only three of our students enrolled, allowing our students to register for such courses adds value to our program regardless of the number who enroll.