

2T1 Town Hall

COVID-19 and Impact on Experiential Education Rotations

April 15, 2020

FAQ

Background & timeline of communications regarding experiential rotations shared with 2T1 Class:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 15 Dean Dolovich [sent a message to all PharmD students](#) announcing a pause to clinical rotations effective March 16 for a three-week period. The decision was based on key principles outlined in the email. Since that time, program leadership, faculty, and staff have been working closely with partners across U of T, faculties of pharmacy across Canada, and our preceptor community to develop strategies to adjust experiential rotations for all Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy students in the ever-changing context of a global pandemic. Clinical rotations are now officially paused until July 6, 2020.

Additional communications timeline from March 17 to April 20, 2020:

- **March 17:** [Continuing to work together](#)
- **March 20:** [Brief Update on Experiential Rotations](#)
- **March 27:** [PharmD Program Updates](#)
- **April 1:** [Experiential Rotations Update for PharmD Students](#)
- **April 6:** [Update for PharmD students on experiential rotations](#)
- **April 8:** [Experiential Rotation Updates for Students](#) *
- **April 15:** First 2T1 virtual town hall
- **April 20:** Post town hall meeting with 2T1 class leadership, Director of PharmD Program, Director of Communications

Factors that influenced initial APPE rotation decisions (recap of email sent April 8*):

- The University of Toronto Health Science Faculties decided to pause all clinical rotations until July 6, 2020.
- **This decision was made by U of T and applies to all clinical learners in the health sciences.** The decision was influenced in part by the fact that our TAHSN hospital partners and other hospital partners across Ontario have indicated they are not able to accommodate learners at this time.
- In consultation with the Provost and Vice-Provost, the Faculty requested and was granted a declaration of academic disruption at the program level for the entry-to-practice Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) program effective immediately and to April 30, 2021.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Block 1 Study block

- 1. Can students who currently have a NDPC in block 1 & 2 be given the option to complete their rotation as usual?**

We initially determined block 1 would be a study block, but we have heard from some NDPC preceptors that they would like to take students, and we have heard from many of you that you would like to have a rotation in block 1 if feasible. Therefore, we are in the process of determining which NDPC rotations can be made available in blocks 1 and 2. If you have an NDPC rotation already scheduled, we will try to preserve it (if site and preceptor are still available) and we will look to create some new NDPC rotations for block 1 and 2. We do not know how many rotations will be available; however, any new NDPC spots we can acquire for block 1 and 2 will be made available to students. These rotations will be completed remotely using technology.

- 2. What if we have committed to work in block 1 because we were told it was a study block?**

If you have committed to work during block 1 that is not a problem. You can let the OEE know that you have work obligations and will not be available until block 2. The OEE will be sending additional details on the process this week. Students will have the opportunity to select a rotation or may decide to schedule a study block.

- 3. For those who had a rotation cancelled in block 1, will it be rescheduled and will it be at the same site?**

Our goal is for all students to be able to complete the required 35 weeks of rotations to graduate in June 2021. If a block 1 rotation was cancelled, there will be rotations scheduled in future blocks to keep you on track. At this time, we cannot confirm that the rotation will be rescheduled at the same site. As you can imagine, a number of our sites are working in new and challenging circumstances and their ability and/or capacity to take students may have changed.

- 4. If our preceptor agrees to hold a virtual/remote rotation for block 1, can we proceed with it?**

If a student has an NDPC rotation scheduled in block 1 and the site and preceptor can still accommodate, then yes, it will proceed. OEE has already connected with preceptors and sites to confirm these rotations and will be reaching out to students individually with an update this week. If a student has a DPC rotation scheduled in block 1, then no, it will not be able to proceed, as we need to finalize several processes related to virtual DPC rotations.

There are principles and considerations that the University and our partners have agreed upon that need to be in place for any virtual DPC rotation including access to site digital records and privacy/confidentiality considerations, so we are working with sites that have indicated they may be able to proceed with a virtual DPC rotation to ensure these considerations are accounted for. It is unlikely that we can address these considerations, including any official agreements that need to be in place, prior to the start of Block 1.

5. Considering many of us are working at pharmacies anyway, can community pharmacy rotations continue as normal but on an opt-out basis?

Unfortunately, this is not an option. The University of Toronto Health Science Faculties made a decision to pause all clinical rotations for learners until July 6, 2020. The decision was not made lightly. Under the current circumstances, the learning environments may be challenging for learners and preceptors, there may be issues with supply of PPE and should be reserved for clinicians providing care, and public health recommendations for physical distancing state that individuals who are not essential to the delivery of care should stay home. In addition, while working in a pharmacy is an important contribution, especially during this pandemic, there are a number of differences between someone working within a pharmacy and obtaining an educational experience designed to develop professional competencies. Taking all of these factors into consideration, we cannot resume direct patient care in community pharmacy until after July 6.

Block 2 NDPC

6. Will we need to be in GTA for block 2 NDPC or is it all virtual?

NDPC rotations for block 1 and 2 will be virtual, as most non-essential service work is being done from home remotely. Location should not be an issue for block 1 and 2 NDPC rotations.

7. If I had a 10-week rotation-spanning block 2-3, what would happen to my block 3?

In general, we hope that these rotations could continue as a 10-week placement. If sites and preceptors are available and we can offer the rotations then we will go ahead. There may be situations where some rotations cannot continue but the OEE will work with students to determine feasibility.

8. For those who originally had a study block in block 2, will they be required to do the NDPC rotation with everyone else?

Students with a scheduled study block in block 2 can decide if they would like an NDPC in block 1 or block 2 or if they want to keep their study block. Students will still have 3 study blocks total as per usual.

We encourage students to consider taking available rotations early in the year as we do not know how the pandemic will evolve, thus we do not know if the pause on clinical rotations may extend beyond July 6, 2020.

9. How are you going to determine who gets the new block 2 NDPC placements? Will it be lottery based?

For blocks 1 and 2, the OEE has already reached out to sites that have students scheduled to determine if the rotation can continue as planned. There is also likely to be a new match, as well as a lottery. Specific details are still being finalized and students will receive an email this week from the OEE with additional details

10. How is the faculty going to arrange 240 NDPC rotations for block 2? Will it be one professor virtually teaching multiple (5+) students?

We are currently reaching out to our colleagues to determine our current capacity and what is still needed. There are a number of Faculty members who do not usually take NDPC students but who are eager/willing to precept students for blocks 1 and 2. We do anticipate that preceptors may take more than one student per rotation in some cases. We have also reached out to preceptors within our external sites including industry, and we will make these opportunities available once we receive confirmation.

11. What would the virtual NDPC rotations entail for students; e.g., responsibilities, content?

The NDPC rotation requirements will be consistent with the course outline and similar to what they are now. The only difference will be the remote location. We will review the learning outcomes prior to the rotations and determine if any modifications are needed. This information will all be communicated to students and preceptors.

12. Regarding the virtual patient care rotations being prepared, are they for community, hospital or both types of rotations?

Our goal is that the virtual DPC rotations will be for community and hospital, but also for family health teams and other forms of ambulatory practice. We are getting creative and exploring various options for virtual care. It is important to note that virtual care is direct patient care that is provided via various virtual platforms and is delivered remotely. It involves working directly with patients and health care providers in real time through video and/or phone conferencing. Virtual patient care has been available for many years for many health disciplines.

Study blocks

13. Are you going to try to ensure we have no more than 3 study blocks? How many/which of our blocks are we able to miss as per accreditation boards?

Currently our goal is for students to complete 7 rotation blocks (35 weeks) and 3 study blocks (15 weeks). These are our current program requirements. If the disruptions to clinical placements last longer or anything else changes, we will need to reassess the requirements to demonstrate competency and to fulfill the accreditation requirements. We will inform students if any changes need to be made along the way.

It has been pointed out that the 2T0 class had modifications made to their academic year to facilitate graduation. It is important to emphasize that well over 80% of the class met all of the program requirements prior to the completion of block 9. The cancellation of block 10 required the Faculty to review students with an outstanding requirement to ensure they met all minimum accreditation standards and all educational outcomes. Any student who fell short was required to do supplemental work to meet program requirements to graduate in June. Now we believe that your class can complete all of the program rotations, hence we are not adjusting our requirements right now. If the pandemic progresses and we need to reassess what students are able to do we can consider other options to facilitate graduation. This is something we will be monitoring on a regular basis.

14. Is it possible to move our block 1 or 2 DPC rotation later in the year to replace one of our study blocks?

Each schedule will be reviewed and revised based on academic requirements and rotation availability. Because of the current situation, there are restrictions that impact rotation schedules. We will need to make adjustments to keep students on track for graduating. If you have a DPC rotation in blocks, 1 or 2 it will be cancelled. You will be reassigned DPC rotations later in your schedule to make up for the cancellation. We cannot guarantee future rotations will be at the same site or with the same preceptor.

15. In the event we have to give up later study blocks, will we be given the choice of which to give up?

At this point, we do not know what will happen to later blocks. We are currently working on getting blocks 1 & 2 up and running and then we will focus on blocks 3-10. Overall, our goal is for all students to graduate on time, hence we may need to make changes that would not normally be required. If a student has a circumstance that would require a specific block to remain a study block, a petition can be submitted.

16. If I petitioned to have a certain block off, will that petition still stand?

At this point, this question is difficult to answer as we do not know how the pandemic events are going to impact later blocks. If you have an approved petition then we will do our best to uphold your petition. Dr. Kellar will work with the OEE and the Registrar's office to review the students with approved petitions. We will contact these students individually once we have more information.

General rotation questions

1. How will cancelled required rotations (community/hospital) be made up?

The OEE will be revising student schedules to ensure all required rotations are completed. More information on how this will be done will be made available in the coming weeks.

2. If I already had 2 NDPC rotations outside of blocks 1-2, will I be allowed to have more than 2 NDPC rotations total?

The total allowed NDPC rotations will remain the same for now; hence, some later NDPC rotations may need to be changed if students complete all of the NDPC requirements earlier in the year. We recognize this situation is not ideal; however, we are trying to keep students on track to graduate. With the current DPC restrictions, we have had to make adjustments. We will do our best to work with students and find suitable arrangements. The situation is constantly evolving and requires us to be nimble to make certain types of rotations available in larger numbers earlier in the year.

3. Has the faculty reached out to the block 1-2 NDPC preceptors to see if they are willing to continue with those scheduled placements?

The Faculty is in communication with preceptors and is in the process of re-confirming availability.

4. Are there plans to increase the number of placements in later blocks to make up for the ones that have been cancelled in block 1-2?

As noted, our goal is to provide all students with 35 weeks of experiential placements by May 2021. We will continue to offer as many rotations as possible and will create new virtual options. It is difficult to say what the exact numbers will be at this time as the current situation may change rapidly.

5. Will the rule that says we can't have 7 blocks in a row be waived for this year?

For this year, we will adapt as the situation evolves. We hope that students will not have to do 7 rotations in a row, but this will depend on the circumstances. We are committed to being creative and flexible to facilitate students meeting the educational requirements.

6. When can we expect updates about block 2, 3, or 4?

We will update everyone as soon and as frequently as possible. We are working on blocks 1 and 2 now, and aim to have more information to share in the next few weeks. Dr. Kellar will work with your class council to establish a communication plan moving forward.

7. Would it be possible for students to be consulted for future decisions regarding APPEs?

We can certainly discuss ways for students to provide input and feedback related to APPEs; however, consultation in all decisions is not feasible. There is a number of decisions that are made at the University level that all Faculties must follow. There are rules and guiding principles that come from the Council of Health Sciences Deans that all of the Health Faculties agree to work with. There are also rules and challenges that are site specific. Hence, the Faculty leadership team has a number of factors to weigh into the decisions we make, as well as needing to think about the educational requirements that need to be met. We recognize that the uncertainty and all of the changes are challenging, but we are committed to creating rotations that will enable everyone to meet the requirements to graduate on time.

Fees

8. What are Faculty's (and University's) plans regarding the reduction of 4th year tuitions and this year's incidental fee for services and facilities we are unable to use?

The University has determined that for the 2020 summer session, there will be no changes to tuition fees. This is because all academic programs are continuing through alternative delivery modes and students will receive academic credit for their courses. At this time, we have not received information about whether or not incidental fees will be adjusted for services that may not be offered (e.g., Athletic facilities). Updates will be provided as new information becomes available.

9. Will there be reductions in tuition if we do not end up doing all 7 blocks?

Again, our goal is for students to complete 35 weeks of rotations.

10. Will tuition be deferred?

The timeframe for payment of tuition for the 2020 summer session will not be deferred, although the deadline for payment has been extended by two weeks. The Registrar has provided information to your class on fees payment procedures and on the process for OSAP recipients to request a tuition deferral. Questions related to this should be directed to the Registrar (brenda.thrush@utoronto.ca).

11. Will the university compensate students for rent or travel that has already been paid for block 1 and 2?

Information on financial support available to students for costs incurred as a result of the COVID situation was provided by Dr. Bjelajac Mejia, in an email message sent on April 17.

Graduation

12. Will our graduation date be affected if a required community/hospital rotation was cancelled?

As noted, our goal is for all students to graduate in June 2021 as per normal, having met all of the educational requirements. If anything changes with the pandemic impacting this goal, we will let you know.

13. Since there is a possibility that more blocks will have to be cancelled, what are the minimum requirements for us to receive our PharmD?

The requirements for a U of T PharmD are our program requirements. If there are further disruptions that impact your class, we will review the educational outcomes and determine what is needed for minimum competency.

14. Will our requirements be adjusted to complete the degree (e.g., the mandatory community and hospital placements)? If not, how will students who are missing required rotations be accommodated?

As noted, we are adjusting the schedule to allow all students to meet the current program requirements. If the situation continues and this is not possible, we will review our options to ensure all students have access to rotations to meet competency requirements.

15. If missed blocks are not going to be made up, how will this affect requirements for graduating with honors?

The criteria to graduate with honors will be reviewed and revised if necessary. We are currently reviewing processes for the 2T0 class, which will inform future processes.

Miscellaneous

16. What is the faculty's plan for our rotations if the COVID situation is not resolved by July?

The plan is to continue moving forward with virtual placements and virtual learning in various ways. We do not know how things will unfold so we are planning to create capacity virtually to meet our needs if we cannot resume direct patient contact. All virtual DPC rotations will involve providing direct patient care through virtual means. It will involve working with actual patients and health care providers through virtual platforms. This is not the same as virtual interactive cases (VIC) which are often used for simulation based education.

17. A large portion of the class will not have hospital experience when applying to residency programs this coming year. Do you anticipate the residency selection process changing to reflect this?

We work closely with the residency programs and they are very aware of the current situation and the impact to rotations. This will all be taken into account for the upcoming residency cycle. Residency programs include selection criteria beyond hospital experience; hence, you are still set up for success. More information about residencies will be made available as we receive it.

18. What is the faculty prioritizing when responding to COVID in relation to APPEs? Please rate as "very important" on the agenda, or "not a priority" for each factor.

a. Graduating the Class of 2021 in Spring 2021

This is a key priority as noted.

b. Ensuring that all mandatory hospital and community APPE rotations are completed

Our goal is for students to complete all rotations. They may look different but the learning outcomes will still be aligned with competencies.

c. Minimizing financial burden and disruption of Pharmacy Students

We certainly want to minimize financial burden and will do what we can in this regard.

d. Providing tuition relief to Pharmacy students if rotations cannot be completed in a term.

This will be determined by U of T Central.

e. Ensuring the workplace safety of Pharmacy students on APPE rotations

This is always as a priority and now more than ever.

f. Having a unified and consistent response between faculties at U of T

This is important on shared issues.

g. Having a unified and consistent response between faculties of Pharmacy across Canada

We connect with other pharmacy schools across the country and align when and where we can. We also are in regular communication with our program accrediting body CCAPP who remains updated on general program delivery situations across the country. However, some decisions are determined by our Universities, so we do not all have the same options for various matters. In addition, the provinces have different rules and scopes and are experiencing the pandemic differently and there is not always opportunity for alignment. We work together and support each other when we can.

h. Ensuring flexibility of response as the COVID situation evolves

This is a guiding principle and we are being as flexible as we can and will continue to be. There are places where we can be flexible, but there some places where that may not always be possible.

i. Minimizing liability to the Faculty as a result of COVID-related harms to students

We prioritize safety of students in all settings, all the time. The safety of our students is not discussed in the context of Faculty liability. We are a health faculty that ensures students are working in safe environments and we educate students how to practice safely.

j. Providing students with timely communication and workable alternatives on how to proceed with their degree.

We prioritize all communications and are providing it as timely as possible. We are committed to working on alternatives as appropriate and feasible. There is a lot to be considered in each decision so some issues take longer to work through.

19. For those who value experience, is it possible to complete any missing rotations in 2021?

This is not likely, as once individuals graduate, they are no longer students. The change in status creates numerous challenges to our site agreements.

20. If there is another wave of COVID-19 in the fall, will you again change that block into a study block for all students?

It is difficult to say how we will respond, as our responses depend on the details of the circumstances. We hope to have virtual rotations available before the fall so they could be an option.

21. Did the faculty consider shortening each of the rotation blocks to 4 weeks each, as opposed to 5 weeks, so that after 10 weeks off (original block 1 and 2), we can just start the rotation year as normal? This would allow us to keep our original study blocks and most of our original rotation sites as well. I understand this would alter the dates for the blocks and may affect preceptor availability. However, most preceptors originally (especially NDPC and community) gave their availability for all 10 blocks anyway. Preceptors can be asked if they are available for the new block dates and if there are any issues then those can be accommodated for the individual students who are affected. This would be a much better option than automatically giving us block 1 as a study block. I feel most students would not want a study block as their very first block because under normal circumstances, students prefer early study blocks either to travel or work part-time jobs, which both are not possible right now. A study block later on is where we actually use that time to prepare for upcoming rotations and exams.

Students are now able to complete an NDPC rotation in blocks 1 or 2 or can have a study block in block 1 or 2. However, our main goal is for all students to meet the program requirements and to graduate on time. Pharmacy practice in hospitals and communities looks different now and many sites will have changes to their availability as previously stated. We need time to work with sites to make sure the environments are conducive to learning, safe, that preceptors can be available, etc. We also need to work on creating virtual rotations, as it is possible that the current pause is extended. We have all hands on deck working on these challenges and we are brainstorming a lot of options. We have considered changing the duration of rotations, however, longer blocks would be preferred to minimize movement and onboarding/training requirements. There are numerous factors to consider and we are doing our best to give all students opportunity to complete the program by spring 2021.