

Academic Unit Planning

Considerations for Virtual Panel Visits

July 2020

Academic Unit Planning: Considerations for Virtual Panel Visits

Background

This document is prepared in light of the travel restrictions and closures during the Covid-19 pandemic. As of May 4th, 2020, only residents of NL and people who meet specific exemption categories are permitted to travel to the province for the foreseeable future, which prevents external panelists from travelling to Memorial for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester and likely part of the Fall 2020 semester. Two panel visits have been delayed from Winter 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with one of which having already been postponed because of the St. John's Snowstorm in January. In light of the postponed panel visits, multiple panel visits scheduled for the Fall 2020 semester, and the increasing likelihood of a travel ban extending into the Fall semester, it is necessary to adapt to allow AUP processes to proceed.

One of these adaptations will be enabling virtual panel visits. This document is prepared in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, but the AUPC acknowledges that virtual panels may be a viable solution to challenges for scheduling panel visits in the future.

Key Considerations

Virtual solutions:

Memorial holds licences for videoconferencing platforms such as WebEx which could offer an acceptable alternative to allow external panelists to interact with the AUP panel visit process. Videoconferencing is preferred over telephone because of the amount of interaction and the fact that queues may be missed in audio-only communication.

Potential challenges:

- No face-to-face interaction between external panelists and internal stakeholders/panelists. Normally, the panel would meet for breakfasts, lunches, and dinners to get to know each other and deliberate. Videoconferencing solutions are not perfect replacements for this in-person interaction.
 - *Possible solution:* we can ensure that external and internal panelists have the opportunity to converse via videoconferencing and email prior to the start of the virtual panel visit.
- External panelists will not be able to physically tour the facilities, which is a key component of the panel visit.
 - *Possible solution:* digital mapping, a video tour, or another virtual solution to allow panelists to “experience” the facilities. An assessment tool will be developed to allow units to provide details on infrastructure.

- Panel visits will normally take place over a period of 2.5 days. This would not be possible during a virtual panel visit because it is unreasonable to expect external panelists to sit in front of a computer for the same amount of time.
 - *Possible solution:* the virtual panel visit will occur over a longer period of time to allow better scheduling and comfort for panelists. This timeframe will likely differ based on the availability of students, faculty, staff, and panelists, but it should occur over no longer than a two-week period.
- During the Covid-19 situation, there may be concerns that the pandemic and altered structure for faculty, staff, and students will influence the validity of the panel visit.
 - *Possible solution:* panels should make note of the unique circumstances in panel reports. While this presents a challenge, there is uncertainty as to when in-person panel visits will be permitted, and it is necessary to continue AUP processes where possible.

Scheduling of the Virtual Panel:

A sample itinerary for a two-week virtual panel is provided in Appendix A. This is intended as a guide for academic units when scheduling panelists, and some units may wish to schedule their panels over a period shorter than 14 days. When scheduling virtual panels, the following considerations should be made:

- 1) Shorter meetings over multiple days: as external panelists will likely be sitting at a computer for the panel meetings, and will likely retain some of their daily work responsibilities during this time, it will be necessary to schedule meetings over a longer period of time than would be done with an in-person panel visit;
- 2) Similar amount of work to an in-person panel visit: the virtual panel visit is not intended to expand the amount of work completed by panelists. The total amount of hours for meetings and report writing should remain approximately the same as that of in-person visits, but will be conducted over an extended period of time;
- 3) Technical requirements: at least 1 week prior to the virtual panel, the AUP coordinator will ensure all panelists and participants have access to the technologies required to participate in the panel.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE VIRTUAL PANEL ITINERARY



[Unit Name/Program]
 Virtual Panel Itinerary – [Dates]
 [Videoconferencing Platform]

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Day	Activity	Suggested Time
Day 1	Panelists meet via videoconferencing platform to provide introductions and personal backgrounds. AUP Coordinator initially chairs the meeting, describes how to conduct the online interaction and describes the review process, including the technical elements. If the Panel Chair has been appointed, AUP Coordinator yields control of the meeting to the Chair, and remains as recording secretary.	~ 2 hours
Day 2 - 4	Scheduled interviews with Unit administration, students, faculty and staff.	30 minutes per interview. Up to 8 hours in total.
Day 5	Scheduled interview with Dean of Record and exit interviews with Unit Head and faculty, staff and students to share preliminary findings.	~ 1.5 hours
Day 6	Panel meets to discuss findings and set writing assignments. AUP Coordinator provides guidance on composition and form of report.	~ 2 hours
Day 7 - 9	Writing of report.	
Day 10	Discussion of panel report draft.	~ 2 hours
Day 11 - 13	Individual panelists review and finalize the report.	
Day 14	Final discussion and submission of panel report.	~ 2 hours