

Heller Town Hall Q&A, March 31, 2020

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Please see the [Brandeis Coronavirus/COVID-19](#) web page for all campus updates and FAQs

I. ACADEMICS

Question: Courses should not be continuous 3-hour classes as they are when they are held in-person. This is not recommended for online education. Can we think of ways to do them differently, like holding the interactive portion together during class time and the professor could prepare recorded lectures that are uploaded to Latte?

Answer: It is true that three-hour classes are not recommended for online education. For this semester, we are constrained by the existing course schedule. To avoid adding to the challenges that COVID-19 has introduced to our teaching, we decided not to modify the weekly calendar for the second half of the semester. As we face the possible need for online education in the future, we will certainly look closely at the class timing issue and consider alternatives for better content delivery. Faculty has been sharing “best practices” for online teaching with each other in an effort to improve the learning experience.

Question: Some students will have to (or will choose to) get letter grades this semester. If the pass-fail option for students is adopted, what will this mean for the students who choose to get letter grades? Will professors assign grades more harshly now that they think students are being evaluated on a pass-fail basis? Many professors stated that they would be grading more leniently. If the pass-fail option is adopted, does that mean that these professors won't be doing that?

Answer: Faculty are instructed to give letter grades. After seeing their grades, students may elect to change their letter grade to the credit/no-credit option. To read more about this policy, please see the March 31 communication from Provost Lisa Lynch, “[New Credit/No Credit Option for Graduate Students Spring 2020.](#)”

Question: This unprecedented time brought a lot of difficulties to our lives - especially the students who are from abroad and those with family responsibilities. Is there any plan to extend the deadline of paper submission for Heller students?

Answer: After classes finish on Wednesday, April 29, there will be two MAKE-UP days on Thursday, April 30, and Friday, May 1. These two days will provide an opportunity for additional office hours between faculty and students, review sessions and end-of-course reflective sessions, as well as time for students to complete coursework, projects,

presentations and other assignments. Faculty will not use this time to require additional work or assignments from students.

Please reach out to your program about any difficulties in completing final assignments by the deadline. They will work with each student on a case by case basis to adjust plans as needed. The Provost has also announced a revised Spring 2020 academic calendar with extended dates for end-of-semester make-up days, study days and exam days. See Provost Lynch's April 13 communication, "[Revised Spring 2020 Academic Calendar](#)."

Question: I know the school is adjusting the requirements for the dual program summer practicums but I was wondering what the school is going to do for students who might not be able to secure an internship with everything that is going on?

Answer: We have adjusted the requirements for the summer practicums, and established alternative options. Please reach out to Sarah LaMorey (slamorey@brandeis.edu) or Mary Poor (mpoor@brandeis.edu) who can assist you with determining which option is best for your circumstances.

Question: I have several classes that have team assignments due at the end of the semester. The following are questions about scenarios that I am aware my classmates have encountered:

- If one or more members of a team is not, or is no longer, effectively participating in the work for the assignment, how will the professor or the Heller School address this?
- If one or more team members chooses to get an incomplete (including for team assignment), how does this affect the remaining team members? Will the other team members be forced also to take an incomplete? What happens if the remaining team members are set to graduate this term?
- What happens when one or more team members opts for the CR instead of a grade while other team members want a letter grade? If the team member(s) wanting the CR stop working effectively on the team assignment, does this mean that the other team members are either forced to take the CR as well or to do the additional work of their team members?

Answer: These are unique circumstances that call for balancing both the needs of the group and the needs of individual team members. In these situations, the team should work with the instructor to address difficulties with group dynamics and participant effort. If the faculty member is not willing or not able to address the problem, the team should approach the program director.

II. TUITION

Question: Because we have moved to an online teaching platform, is a tuition discount being considered for this semester?

Answer: The university is continuing to provide all spring courses and students are receiving course credit and making the same progress toward their degrees that they otherwise would have made. While Brandeis has made refunds for unused room and board, the university will not make refunds for spring tuition ([see the complete answer on the Brandeis COVID-19 FAQs](#)).

Question: It is looking as if our summer semester for the MBA program will be online. I know students will not receive a tuition reimbursement for the remainder of the spring semester, but is there any thought being given to reimbursing MBA students who will most likely have their entire next semester online?

Answer: The MBA summer semester will be held online at the regular tuition rate.

Question: I am concerned that the university will raise tuition next year to make up for losses this year. Can we be assured that tuition will never be raised on those of us who were students during this pandemic?

Answer: Decisions about tuition are made at the university level. We are unable to make any assurances about future tuition rates. We will keep you informed about these decisions as they are made.

III. SERVICES AND BUILDINGS

Question: Now that the Food Pantry is closed, what are some alternatives for students?

Answer: Up to date food (and other) resources in the Waltham area are provided through the [Watch CDC Website](#).

If you are experiencing food insecurity over the coming weeks, please email emergencyfunds@brandeis.edu. If you have further concerns, please email Grad Affairs (gradstudentaffairs@brandeis.edu) for additional resources.

Additional Resources:

[Food Finder Resource](#): The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) partners with 500+ hunger-relief agencies, including food pantries, community meal programs and other food assistance providers throughout the nine counties and 190 towns and cities across Eastern Massachusetts.

The city of Waltham hosts the Watch City Market, a food pantry that is located in the McDevitt Middle School Cafeteria at 75 Church Street in Waltham. It is sponsored by The Greater Boston Food Bank and Healthy Waltham. On April 2nd, May 7th and June 4th from 4:00-6:00pm, participants can receive fresh produce, meats, dairy items and basic grocery staples. Pre-registration is required at wpsmarket@walthampublicschools.org or 781-314-5400.

Additional food pantry options that are available in Waltham can be found at this [link](#).

Question: Can you provide an update on the status of the Emergency Fund?

Answer: The Emergency Fund is being disbursed to students on a case-by-case basis. Effort is being made to raise more funds. You can view an updated tally of funds raised for the Emergency Fund [here](#). There will be communication to the community about the emergency fund and how it is being used.

Question: A very valued member of our community is Rose in Starbucks. During the COVID-19 crisis, what is the situation for Rose and other workers like her?

Answer: Sodexo food service employees continue to be employed by Sodexo and have access to health insurance. Brandeis is partnering with local hospitals and Sodexo during the coronavirus crisis to support healthcare workers. For more information, see the April 9 communication from Lois Stanley, VP, Campus Operation, "[Sodexo Dining Services Staff](#)."

Question: Which buildings on campus are closed and which are open?

Answers:

The Heller School: The Heller School buildings were officially closed as of March 18. There is a small group of staff designated to be present in the Heller building. Individuals with a Brandeis ID and authorized access may enter the Heller School for specific reasons but should first notify either Ravi Lakshmiathan (kanthan@brandeis.edu) or Ron Etlinger (etlinger@brandeis.edu).

Residence Halls: As of the end of March, 2,400 undergraduate students had moved off campus. Three hundred twenty remain on campus and have been reallocated across residence halls.

Classrooms and Labs: As of the end of March, three faculty members continued to teach in their classrooms and were urged to move to teaching their classes online.

The one lab open on campus is for a faculty member doing research on possible therapies for COVID-19. All other labs are closed. The only staff coming to campus are those who support animal care. See the April 8 communication from Provost Lynch, "[Updates on COVID-19 Policies](#)" for additional information.

Library: The website currently states that the Goldfarb and Farber Library buildings will be closed until further notice. Library services will be delivered via Zoom, Chat or email. Library material does not need to be returned until the Library re-opens. Late fines will be waived.

Commuting to Campus: In response to Governor Baker's stay-at-home guidance, Brandeis has further reduced the number of people commuting to campus.

Question: Is mail still being delivered to Heller and is anyone checking the mail for donor/grant checks?

Answer: Mail is presently being held at the Usdan post office. We are making arrangements for periodic review for checks and urgent correspondence. Staff at Turner Street are accepting checks via a drop-box.

IV. RESPONSE OF HELLER AND BRANDEIS TO THE PANDEMIC

Question: I would like to know what Heller and Brandeis as a whole are doing to support responses to the pandemic.

Answer: Brandeis collected various PPE items sourced from science labs on campus and donated them to the Waltham Fire Department and other local health care and first responder organizations. [Learn more about that effort here.](#) The Brandeis Maker Lab is organizing a knowledge base of other MakerLabs at universities around the country rather than directly printing. They believe the biggest impact they can make is to develop rigorously tested templates and best practices that can be scaled up.

The Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health has solicited volunteers (especially public health students) to conduct contact tracing. Information about this volunteer opportunity was sent to the Heller student community via mass email from Joanne Beswick on April 3. [The volunteer sign-up form is available here.](#) Please contact Cindy Thomas with questions (cthomas@brandeis.edu).

We will be holding several online Heller panels in May to discuss the economic and public health impacts of the pandemic. We will be providing details about the date and time those panels soon.

V. MESSAGING TO APPLICANTS

Question: Some student communities want to study abroad and have already applied to various universities including Heller School. I would like to suggest having some guidelines for these students who have already applied at Heller School, so that they have an idea what is going on and what they should do.

Answer: There are some things over which the Heller School has little control, such as embassies and consulates being closed to visa applications. The School has been working to make sure students have all their materials ready to go so that, once embassies and consulates re-open, applications can be sent. The Heller School admissions office is working closely with the ISSO.

International applicants should complete their I-20 paperwork and have it ready to be processed. Students who make a deposit and then find they cannot come to Heller will be refunded their tuition deposit.

VI. Plans for Summer and Academic Year 20-21

Question: If the semester moves remote for Fall 2020, by what date we will be informed of this switch?

Answer: The university has not identified a date by which it will make a decision about the fall semester, though we promise to inform you of any decisions as soon as possible. We are working on how best to achieve our academic mission, balanced with ensuring the health and safety of our campus community. As President Liebowitz noted in [his May 1 campus update](#), members of the university community will deliberate over the coming weeks on the next set of decisions leading into the new academic year.