

## Supporting Our Students (and You)

We are sharing this message from the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences to the broader college community because it is an important message about how our students, and you, are coping with this major disruption. *“Ask for help, offer help where you can, and be kind to those who are struggling, like you, to support our students. Breathe.”*

-----Original Message-----

From: Kenneth Gould, Dean of School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Sent: Wednesday, March 18, 2020 11:50 AM

To: Staff E-Mail <staff\_email@brooklyn.cuny.edu>

Subject: Supporting our HSS Students

HSS colleagues,

Thank you for your Herculean efforts to move your classes into emergency remote/online access mode. This would be a daunting task under normal circumstances, and these circumstances are anything but normal. We are going to do the best we can to help our students through an incredibly difficult semester. I encourage you to be transparent with them, and with yourselves about how difficult this is, how stressed we all are worrying about the health of our families, our friends, our community and ourselves. The challenges you face to learn new technologies as you are teaching, to find ways to distill your classes into something that translates to distance learning, and to maintain focus in the context of a global public health emergency are real. Let's continue to support each other as we have in the lead up to putting our curricula online tomorrow. Ask for help, offer help where you can, and be kind to those who are struggling, like you, to support our students. Breathe.

Our students are under a tremendous amount of stress right now, too. We often say that our students have complicated lives. Their lives are a lot more complicated now. I encourage you to approach them with deep compassion as you work with them online. Many of our students have lost the only study spaces where they feel comfortable. It is hard to teach from your kitchen. It is hard for them to learn from wherever they must locate now. For many, the loss of a familiar, comfortable, safe study space will make learning incredibly difficult. Many students will not be comfortable with distance learning. They will feel that they cannot learn and study the way they are used to. College is hard, and the move to distance learning will feel overwhelming for many of them. All of this is likely to make them anxious, angry, sad, and/or depressed.

Their social networks have been disrupted. They will be missing their study groups, their athletic teams, their clubs, and the friends and familiar faces that make them feel supported.

Despite our best efforts to provide institutional support remotely, our students will have and feel less supported by the institution. Their contact with a range of student support services on campus is

diminished. Their primary institutional connection will be through you online through the platforms you've selected.

While you are likely choosing one platform through which to deliver your courses, our students will be faced with faculty using different platforms for the classes they are taking. If you had to learn one platform in a week, they may have to learn four in a day. Despite coming of age in a digital age, they will struggle with this.

Of course, they will manage all this while deeply worried about the health, safety, and economic security of their families, friends, and themselves as they and their loved ones lose their jobs or become ill, or both.

While it is common to try to compensate for lost class time with extra independent assignments, extra reading, extra papers, extra exams, etc., please fight this impulse. Our students will be struggling mightily with this stress and change and difficult learning environment. They will need time and space to adjust, and they will be able to do less with less institutional contact, support, and resources. Their capacity to manage all this is a real constraint that you will need to respect and work within.

Finally, although our students mostly live adult lives, many of them are adolescents, with all of the emotion and drama and uncertainty that that entails. Be gentle with them.

I apologize for the lengthy email. I promise to keep emails from the Dean few and far between as you launch into this unprecedented effort to keep the semester going. The HSS Dean's office is functioning remotely, and we remain available to help in any way that we can.

Good luck, and good health,

Ken

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