

3/16/2020 [Allunit] MSP update on COVID-19 guidance

Dear colleagues,

Our hearts go out to everyone struggling with anxiety and concern (that is most of us), those who are self-quarantined, and those caring for loved ones, including small children without school or childcare for the foreseeable future. There is so much confusion on campus, and we wanted to update you with answers to some basic questions.

First, NO classes will meet face-to-face on campus for the rest of this spring semester. Some of you have received contradictory and confusing guidance, but as of now, no classes -- grad or undergrad -- should be meeting in person. All experts are recommending physical distancing to the extent possible.

We know that the transition to remote systems is very difficult for faculty and students. As we reported last week, MSP requested a one-week extension of spring break, as many other universities have done, to give us time to prepare for remote teaching. The administration has said no. We appealed this decision to the Provost and Chancellor and we were again told no.

However, we want to encourage everyone to do what works best for your own courses and, just as important, for your students, who are also struggling. Your academic freedom is protected by our union contract. If the shift to remote teaching presents a hardship for you, please know that you are free to develop plans that work for you and your students. For example, you can give your students independent assignments for a week or two after spring break. You can ask students to email you their work or post it on Moodle. Experts on online education are telling us that best practices are asynchronous -- not assuming that everyone will be able to attend a virtual class at the scheduled time. Students may be in different time zones that make your regular schedule impractical, or the disruption caused by the public health emergency may prevent them from logging on at specific times each week. You should feel free to create asynchronous activities and assignments instead of synchronous class sessions. You can adjust your course schedules in whatever way is feasible for you and most supportive of your students' needs.

MSP has asked the administration to allow the pass/fail option this semester. Other universities have done this, and more are considering it. Our students did not sign up for online courses, most of our faculty were not trained or prepared to teach online courses, and no one should suffer for these extenuating circumstances. Our students should be taking care of themselves,

their education, and their families, without worrying about their GPA. We have been inspired by many creative responses by faculty all over the world, such as this post by Professor Davidson at Columbia University:

<https://medium.com/@jennydavidson/the-message-i-sent-to-my-seminar-students-today-16f23c0e9194>

We have received assurances from the administration that faculty and staff will not be penalized for the changes in our working conditions. Faculty and librarians' professional development funds that are unused because of coronavirus will not expire and will be extended into the next academic year. The Provost's office will work with MSP to make sure that faculty and librarians who take on new work this spring will be recognized for that work, and our evaluations will appropriately reflect what was required during this crisis period.

Finally, we have heard that some colleges and departments have sent faculty conflicting information about whether they are considered "essential personnel" who must report to campus. We have confirmed with the Provost's Office that faculty are NOT required to come to campus. Some faculty, of course, have responsibilities that require them to be in their labs or offices, and that is not a problem as long as everyone follows safety protocols. But it should be clear that no faculty -- lecturers, tenure-system faculty, part-time faculty -- are required to be on campus. The library is closed. For now, faculty and librarians still have access to our offices as needed.

As always, we are working closely with the other unions on campus and we remain in solidarity with our staff and students. Guidance for staff is posted here:

<https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/news/covid-19-employee-health-faq>. I will be in regular conference calls with staff unions and also with student leaders. We especially appreciate our staff colleagues who are keeping the heat on, taking care of the students who must remain on campus, and following intensified cleaning protocols to keep everyone safe.

Thank you to the many MSP members who have reached out and shared ideas and information about shifting to remote teaching and learning during this crisis. Please continue to let us know if you hear information that concerns you, and we will do our best to clear up any misconceptions. We are so grateful to everyone who is responding to this crisis with compassion and solidarity.

In Solidarity,

Eve Weinbaum for the MSP Executive Board

Allunit mailing list

Allunit@external.umass.edu

<https://list.umass.edu/mailman/listinfo/allunit>