



OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

March 19, 2020

Dear staff and faculty,

As you know, after a week-long academic recess prompted by the outbreak of COVID-19, [CUNY today resumed classes](#) for its 275,000 students, employing distance learning modalities. It is with great pride and renewed purpose that all of us with our students, literally and virtually, re-opened our doors to all who depend on CUNY. Thank you.

In a time of crisis, institutions like CUNY that are integral to the life of our great state and city and its future have an especially important role to play. CUNY's role in the face of the challenges posed by the [coronavirus](#) is both to protect the safety of our community members and to ensure that all of our students, regardless of their circumstances, are able to continue their education.

Over the last week and more, our offices have been fielding numerous requests for additional details and guidance. My leadership team and I have been working closely with college presidents and deans to ensure [as smooth a transition as possible for students](#) today, and for members of our teaching and non-instructional faculty and professional staff.

My prior experience as president of both a four-year college and a community college in our University showed me how distinct each of our 25 campuses is, and the challenges and pitfalls of trying to craft policies, and enforce them in one-size-fits-all fashion for all of CUNY, particularly at a time when adaptability was of prime importance. That is why we provided flexibility for colleges to tailor these guidelines and directives to best serve the individual circumstances and needs of their community.

That said, throughout this process I have consistently emphasized our ironclad commitment to protecting the health and safety of each and every member of the CUNY community, even as we enable our students to fulfill their academic

requirements, protect their financial aid and successfully complete the spring semester.

I am pleased with the speed that we are accomplishing those goals. Early estimates from this morning suggest that CUNY faculty and staff have already moved up to 95 percent of CUNY's astounding 50,000 course sections to distance learning instruction, and that 95 percent of CUNY's staff members are already working from home.

The following guidelines have been provided over the last week to faculty and staff to ensure essential operations continuity while prioritizing the health, safety and wellbeing of faculty and staff in all Central Office locations and college campuses.

Remote Work Guidelines

The widespread conversion to distance education is intended to dramatically reduce the density of students. To maximize the number of employees who could telecommute or otherwise significantly limit their time on campus, we have called for flexible work arrangements to be used as liberally as possible, even extending them to many employees whose services have been deemed essential. [These guidelines](#) have been established with the goal of minimizing faculty and staff exposure to the virus and maximizing social distancing as part of community mitigation strategies set by the CDC. Some of the remote work accommodations include: flexible scheduling, telecommuting, staggered work shifts and condensed workweeks.

Managers have been instructed to remain as flexible and accommodating as possible. Furthermore, as these guidelines are implemented, managers are instructed to work closely with Human Resources directors to communicate clear expectations and maintain continuous support and supervision. Accommodations have been, and will continue to be made, for any employee who is in a high-risk category for COVID-19 or anyone who shares a household with a person in a high-risk category. These individuals, including those who have been deemed essential, should communicate if they haven't their circumstances to supervisors and the campus Human Resources office.

Technology Resources

There are [a number of technology tools](#) available to support our CUNY staff who need to work from a remote location. Many of these tools are used every day by college and Central Office staff. These systems and services, used by staff and administrators, include on-line access from anywhere to CUNYfirst, DegreeWorks, Blackboard, Microsoft Office 365 for Education (this includes OneDrive and the

cloud versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Teams and SharePoint), Dropbox and WebEx. There are extensive user guides and training videos available to our CUNY workforce that will allow familiarization with these invaluable tools.

Minimizing Social Density

Students are discouraged from going to campuses unless necessary. For courses requiring special facilities, such as labs or performance spaces, that have not yet been transitioned to distance education mode, campuses can continue in-person instruction in the campus facilities necessary as long as strict social distancing rules are applied. In response to Governor Cuomo's directive, campuses have been directed to cancel, postpone or move to a virtual platform all non-essential, non-instructional social gatherings or events of more than 50 people for the duration of the Spring 2020 semester. Additionally, campuses have been instructed to make creative use of the space that has been vacated through our efforts to date to further minimize social density, through for example, the relocation of staff and services.

Protocol for Establishing Essential Personnel

Each campus president and dean determines which personnel are needed on campus. This is consistent with Governor Cuomo's [Executive Order](#), which defines essential personnel as "anyone whose job function is essential to the effective operation of their agency or authority, or who must be physically present to perform their job, or who is involved in the COVID-19 emergency response." There are many employees who have been deemed essential, but whose jobs can and will be performed remotely, if so authorized by their supervisor. It is important to note that as we navigate this emergency, the members of our campus communities who can be expected to be classified as essential employees may shift over time, depending on campus, University, city, and state needs.

Facilities

I have removed libraries, research facilities and computer laboratories from the list of campus facilities that must remain open for the duration of the semester, though college presidents and deans will retain the flexibility to make specific determinations regarding which of these spaces should remain open, the number of staff needed and the corresponding hours of service for their campus. In making those determinations, they are strongly advised to strike a balance between safety considerations and those of academic and business continuity. Several campuses are keeping a floor or section of the library open to manage computer loan programs for students or to have a computer lab available, with minimum staffing. Child care centers will remain open with the minimum number of staff needed to address reduced demand, but CUNY is ready to be part of Governor Cuomo's efforts to support the child care needs of medical first responders and any

other needs in this growing emergency. Food pantries will remain open but may also shift their hours.

The instructional recess provided an uninterrupted opportunity to conduct a thorough cleaning of our facilities. This week, Monday and Tuesday were days designated for cleaning and disinfecting CUNY facilities. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's [General Disinfection Guidance for Commercial or Residential Buildings](#) was used to help guide cleaning efforts.

Managing Suspected COVID-19 Incidents

We have been diligent in notifying campus communities of cases of suspected exposure and positive findings, and the level of risk to the community, even when state health officials have advised that the level of risk is low. We have closed buildings and/or campuses so the premises could be deep-cleaned and disinfected, and employees have been asked to stay home until the premises and grounds are thoroughly decontaminated.

I am afraid that as community transmission spreads quickly across New York City and State, our campus communities and Central Office will be touched by more cases of COVID-19. The best way to protect ourselves and control the spread continues to be keeping our hands clean, staying home as much as possible, particularly if we are sick, and practicing strict social distancing.

In recent days and weeks, all of us who live and work in the New York City area have been faced with the urgent necessity of planning for the significant adjustments that are now required in our professional and personal lives, to minimize the risk to ourselves and others in these tumultuous times.

All of you came together over the last five business days to embrace distance teaching and distance working, a valiant effort worthy of the country's largest urban public university, that also allows CUNY to continue as an anchor institution to deliver on its promise of opportunity and social mobility.

None of this has been easy, and the challenges are many. Only by working together, leaning on each other (from a distance) and drawing on our resourcefulness and resilience, as we have done so many times in the past, will we persist. I know this will be the case. I thank you again for your dedication.

Sincerely,

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