

HDS Dean David Hempton's Statement on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

March 10, 2020

Dear members of the Harvard Divinity School community:

I know that COVID-19 is on all our minds. We are in a time of uncertainty and understandable anxiety. Given the rapidly evolving situation, I ask that you please pay close attention to our continued communications so you can stay up to date on ongoing developments.

HDS continues to closely monitor the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and to coordinate with the University to plan for contingencies in order to mitigate any potential disruption to our educational and research activities.

Please read the latest email from Harvard President Lawrence Bacow below. It contains new and important information about University operations and the important value to our community in making the decision to hold classes remotely.

HDS classes will continue as scheduled on campus through the end of this week. All classes will be available remotely via Zoom starting March 23, 2020. Information specific to the HDS campus, including important resources for our students, faculty, and staff, will be available on the new [HDS Coronavirus Updates](#) page. There you will find information specific to the HDS campus, including important resources for our faculty and staff regarding [workplace policies](#) and Zoom training opportunities this week.

The HDS campus is open to students, faculty, and staff, including the library. I ask that when you are on campus you practice appropriate social distancing with a minimum distance of 6 feet and maintain procedures to prevent the spread of this respiratory disease. When feasible all meetings should be held remotely via Zoom or phone. If meeting in person, please spread out and meet in larger spaces.

Please continue to check Harvard's [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) web page](#). This will have the latest University-wide information, policy updates, and resources.

Additionally, with several events already postponed, canceled, or converted to be streamed live and/or recorded, be sure to visit the [HDS Public Events Calendar](#), where entries will be updated as frequently as possible.

Last, for the sake of yourself and the broader community, please continue [to practice appropriate hygiene and to take preventive measures](#).

Thank you as always for your diligence and cooperation in helping to keep our community safe and well. I hope that we will draw strength from each other and support one another during these challenging times.

David N. Hempton
Dean of the Faculty of Divinity

From Harvard University President Lawrence Bacow

March 10, 2020

Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

Like all of you, I have been intently following reports of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and considering the many ways in which its future course might alter my life and the lives of those closest to me. These past few weeks have been a powerful reminder of just how connected we are to one another—and how our choices today determine our options tomorrow.

Fortunately, a group of extremely dedicated people has been working literally around the clock to respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19. Our teams are considering every contingency as they undertake their important work, and I write today to update you on major near-term changes that will limit exposure to the disease among members of our community:

- We will begin transitioning to virtual instruction for graduate and undergraduate classes. Our goal is to have this transition complete by Monday, March 23, which is the first day of scheduled classes following Spring Recess.
- Students are asked not to return to campus after Spring Recess and to meet academic requirements remotely until further notice. Students who need to remain on campus will also receive instruction remotely and must prepare for severely limited on-campus activities and interactions. All graduate students will transition to remote work wherever possible. Schools will communicate more specific guidance and information, and we encourage everyone to review prior guidance about both international and domestic travel.
- We are transitioning over the course of the next few days to non-essential gatherings of no more than 25 people. Please note this is a change from prior guidance.

The decision to move to virtual instruction was not made lightly. The goal of these changes is to minimize the need to gather in large groups and spend prolonged time in close proximity with each other in spaces such as classrooms, dining halls, and residential buildings. Our actions are consistent with the recommendations of leading health officials on how to limit the spread of COVID-19 and are also consistent with similar decisions made by a number of our peer institutions. The campus will remain open, and operations will continue with appropriate measures to protect the health of the community.

For regular updates and additional information, please visit [this dedicated webpage](#). Provost Alan Garber, Executive Vice President Katie Lapp, and HUHS Executive Director Giang Nguyen will continue to send you updates by email as needed. You will also continue to receive School- or Unit-specific information from local leadership. If you are a student or faculty member and have specific questions or

concerns, I encourage you to be in touch with the contacts identified by your dean. If you are an employee, I encourage you to be in touch with your manager.

Despite our best efforts to bring the University's resources to bear on this virus, we are still faced with uncertainty—and the considerable unease brought on by uncertainty. It will take time for researchers, a good many of them who are our colleagues, to understand enough about this disease to mount a reliable defense against it. Now more than ever, we must do our utmost to protect those among us who are most vulnerable, whether physically or emotionally, and to treat one another with generosity and respect. Please remember that [Harvard Counseling and Mental Health Services](#) and the [Harvard Employee Assistance Program](#) are available to help you manage anxiety and stress. Your mental health is just as important as your physical health.

To our students, I know it will be difficult to leave your friends and your classrooms. We are doing this not just to protect you but also to protect other members of our community who may be more vulnerable to this disease than you are.

To our faculty, I recognize that we are asking you midway through the semester to completely rethink how you teach. We do this because we know that you want to avoid putting your students at risk.

To our staff, I understand that we are expecting you to go above and beyond in your efforts to support our important mission of teaching and scholarship. We do this because we know we can rely on your creativity, flexibility, and judgment through these challenging times.

I am proud to be a member of a community where people put the greater good above their own self-interest. Thank you for your patience and your resilience as we all learn to temper increased distance with deeper care for one another.

With appreciation,
Larry

Lawrence S. Bacow
President
Harvard University