

Sent April 27, 2020

Dean Hempton on Planning for Fall 2020

Good afternoon everyone:

I wanted to reach out to our HDS community as an addendum to Provost Garber's recent message, and to touch base with all of you in this moment of grave concern, not only for our own community but the very world in which we live. I wanted to let you know that I am well aware of all the uncertainty and concern that is troubling literally everyone in our community. I want all to know that I am involved in close communication with HDS faculty and administrative leadership as we ponder our path forward. Although no concrete decisions have yet been made, I will continue to keep in touch with you as we continue to consult. Most of all I want to let you know we are pulling together our best selves and our best resources to try to fashion a good future for our School during this crisis and beyond.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone in our HDS community—students, staff and faculty—for their forbearance, resilience, and cooperation as we have all encountered an unprecedented and threatening situation. None of this is easy. We are trying to continue to teach, learn, and advance our educational mission, while preserving the health and safety of ourselves and those around us. Sometimes the challenges are simply overwhelming and exhausting. Thank you everyone for continuing to set high standards under the most difficult circumstances.

The letter from Provost Garber to the members of the Harvard community that went out earlier today makes clear that Harvard will be open for the fall 2020 semester. On current projections, it also seems unlikely that the fall semester will be a "normal" semester with students on campus. That could only take place if there was no significant risk to the health and wellbeing of our entire community. We are nevertheless very committed to making the educational experience at both HDS and wider Harvard as exciting and creative as possible. Perhaps we at HDS might even find ways to make the fall semester more relevant to our current life and situation than ever before. That at least is our hope.

For the past several weeks faculty and staff at HDS have been engaged in serious contingency planning for the fall semester. With more time to prepare for the fall semester than we had for the sudden shift that occurred in the second half of the spring semester, our goal is not just to improve upon our performance, but to offer a stimulating and vibrant educational experience for all our students. To that end, we will be soliciting your feedback, through a survey and invited conversations, on your experience of remote learning in the spring semester and your ideas and suggestions for the fall.

Speaking personally for a moment, I still have a vivid recollection of my own student days during the violence and instability of life in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. As is the case now, it was often hard to focus on education and learning at a time when more urgent concerns were permanently top of the news cycle. I have never regretted persevering through those dark days, which unexpectedly and ironically laid the foundation for anything useful I have been able to contribute in teaching and learning ever since.

In the uncertain days ahead, please be assured that the leadership of HDS will do all it can to preserve the integrity of our institution and its educational mission, and to communicate forthrightly and in a timely fashion with you on the specific challenges at hand. We value your feedback and your partnership, but most of all we value your aspirations to make a difference in the world. No one fully knows what the next few months will bring, but I am confident we will be here in the fall as determined as ever to teach, learn, serve, and grow. Thanks for being part of this very special community, and please stay safe and well.

David N. Hempton,

Dean of the Faculty of Divinity  
Alonzo L. McDonald Family Professor of Evangelical Theological Studies  
John Lord O'Brian Professor of Divinity

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Sent April 27, 2020

Provost Alan Garber on Planning for Fall 2020

Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

Over the past several weeks, the leadership of the University has been focusing on preparations for the coming fall semester. Our goal is to sustain our teaching and research mission during this global pandemic, while also ensuring the health and safety of our community. A range of scenarios has been and will continue to be evaluated for the fall, from fully restored on-campus activities – a “normal” return to campus – to delaying the opening of the University until next spring semester. The consequences of any major decision for a large and complex university like Harvard are themselves complex and highly uncertain.

Yet for us the most important decision is a clear one: Harvard will be open for fall 2020. Our goal is to bring our students, faculty, postdoctoral fellows and staff to campus as quickly as possible, but because most projections suggest that COVID-19 will remain a serious threat during the coming months, we cannot be certain that it will be safe to resume all usual activities on campus by then. Consequently, we will need to prepare for a scenario in which much or all learning will be conducted remotely. Even if conditions do not allow for a traditional fall experience on campus, we are committed to ensuring that the learning and research of our students will continue at the highest levels of excellence and that we will do our part to enable them to achieve their aspirations.

Harvard’s undergraduate college, its range of graduate and professional schools, and the ways they work together are great strengths of the University. Yet their diversity and the many interactions among them also contribute to the complexity of preparing for the fall. Planning throughout the University will be informed by a common understanding of our health and safety needs, but because our Schools have different approaches to learning and research, aspects of the fall semester will likely vary among them. Harvard College and the graduate and

professional Schools will be communicating with students, faculty, staff, and postdoctoral fellows in the days and weeks ahead with more School-specific guidance about plans for fall courses, programs, and activities.

Earlier this spring, we made the difficult decision to empty much of our campus because of the vulnerabilities it poses in a pandemic. The physical spaces that define a university campus – the lecture halls, seminar rooms, athletics and arts venues, dining facilities, and residences – facilitate interaction and build community. But those very features make our campuses susceptible to the spread of infection within and beyond the university community.

When and how we can safely return to these spaces will depend on the status of the pandemic and the strategies that can be deployed to mitigate its effects. We will need to consider whether the epidemiological data and public health models indicate that most disease activity is behind us and that further waves of outbreak are unlikely. If our community has not developed sufficient levels of immunity through recovery from the disease or vaccination, and if safe and effective antiviral therapy is not available, we will likely need adequate supplies of personal protective equipment, reliable and convenient viral testing, robust contact tracing procedures, and facilities for quarantine and isolation. We must do our part to assure the health and safety of everyone within and beyond the Harvard community, particularly those at elevated risk. In the coming months we will learn more about whether these conditions can be met in time for the fall semester.

If much of the teaching this fall needs to be conducted remotely, we anticipate that the experience will be notably different from the current spring semester. In March, our faculty and staff had less than two weeks to prepare for a transition to remote teaching and learning. The contingencies introduced by the pandemic called upon all of us to react quickly to changing information and circumstances with both ingenuity and flexibility, while maintaining our focus on the academic mission of the University. We are grateful to the faculty, staff, students, and postdoctoral fellows who have worked tirelessly to adapt their courses and other activities to the remote status we find ourselves in. Their success in surmounting the challenges presented by the pandemic is extraordinary.

Yet with more time to prepare, we are confident we can create a better, more engaging experience for the fall should many of our activities need to be conducted remotely. Rather than seeking to approximate the on-campus experience online, we can focus our efforts on developing the best possible remote educational experience. A successful shift in pedagogy of this magnitude will require tremendous creativity and dedication from our entire community. Efforts to that end are already underway.

This spring semester has also reminded us that our students come from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Their home environments, resources, and geographic locations are sometimes obstacles to full engagement and immersion in online learning. We are committed to ensuring that all our students, whatever their situations may be, have enriching and successful experiences and are able to maintain their academic progress and continue their

intellectual journeys.

As we plan for the fall, we are fortunate to be able to draw on Harvard's rich history of pedagogical innovation in the residential classroom and online, along with the tools and expertise of our School-based [Centers for Teaching and Learning](#), the [Office of the Vice Provost for Advances in Learning](#) (VPAL), the [Harvard Library](#), and [Harvard University Information Technology](#) (HUIT), among others.

We also recognize that a Harvard education is much more than what happens in the classroom. It takes place during office hours with faculty, meetings of peer study groups, mealtimes with friends, and serendipitous interactions among our diverse and intergenerational community. Should we not be able to resume a fully on-campus experience, our efforts will not end with a shift to remote teaching and learning. We will aim to reimagine other critical elements of the campus experience, re-envisioning Harvard traditions, extracurricular activities, research experiences, and professional development for our students.

Even if we must begin the semester remotely, we hope to return students to campus as soon as it is possible to do so while providing for their safety and that of the entire campus community.

Harvard has long been an innovator in higher education. We can continue to lead by creating and applying new approaches to residential and remote education that benefit not only our community but other colleges and universities as well. In its 384-year history, Harvard has overcome many adversities, drawing on the courage and determination of its community. This extraordinary time calls on us to build on that history, working together in ways we never have before. I thank you in advance for your flexibility, patience, commitment, and creativity.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Garber AB '77, PhD '82, MD  
Provost  
Harvard University