



University Student Senate
555 West 57th Street, 1420
New York, NY 10019
Tel: (646) 664-8844
Fax: (646) 664-8863

To: CUNY University Faculty Senate Members
From: The desk of Timothy Hunter, Chairperson of the University Student Senate
Date: Thursday, March 26, 2020

To whom it may concern,

Greetings Faculty members of the City University of New York. My name is Timothy Hunter and I'm the University Student Senate Chairperson for the 2019-2020 academic year. Firstly, on behalf of all the students in CUNY, thank you for all that you have done thus far. I am aware that this letter comes at a time when stress, fear, and anxiety levels are high. As I write this letter, The City of New York is battling one of the most contagious viruses in modern-day history. The New York Times has reported that an estimated 13 people are dying in NYC hospitals daily and that nearly 40,000 New Yorkers have tested positive for the Coronavirus. These disturbing updates have brought about feelings of uncertainty in not only our university, but also in our communities, our government, and our country. Already underpaid Faculty are being asked to repeatedly change curricula and syllabi that have been meticulously crafted over the years to meet student needs and course requirements. Educators are being asked to change their teaching styles seemingly overnight. In-person discussion and engaging, teachable moments are now limited by Zoom calls and Blackboard Ultra. It seems to many as if all hope is lost. However, I want to reassure you that all hope has not been lost. We, the students believe in you, and in the education and the many opportunities that CUNY affords us, which is why we need your help to navigate through this crisis.

We are aware of the hardships you are experiencing, as we the students are experiencing similar hardships as well. Several students informed me that they are battling housing insecurity, have lost their jobs, and even loved ones in the midst of this COVID-19 outbreak. Unfortunately, our current circumstances are projected to worsen before they get better, but I want to reassure you that we can all make it through, together, in collaboration and solidarity with one another. The CUNY community is stronger and more resilient when we work together, and we ask that the UFS considers strongly observing and encouraging the distance learning pause during this **“recalibration period”** from Friday, March 27th to Wednesday, April 1st.

I bring this up because I have received word from numerous students that some professors still plan to move forward with midterms and assignments. This is troubling considering the Chancellor has already acknowledged this issue and rationale behind this decision through email and highlighted “it may be disruptive to our instructional momentum, but it is essential to make sure thousands of our students don't feel left out of their education.” During the Recalibration Period, CUNY campuses will continue to



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loan laptop computers and iPads out to students who do not have computers at home. Additionally, Faculty will have the opportunity to further explore asynchronous tools and other best practices in distance education to maximize educational access. This time period will be vital for underserved students who still do not have access to computers at home and are contemplating whether they should drop out of college. If we can support them now, and get all students across this semester's finish line, it will have been worth the effort. On behalf of the University Student Senate, I ask that the University Faculty Senate allow this break to serve as a much-needed breather from these turbulent times that we are living in.

I urge you to forward this letter to your colleagues and your respective departments asking them to use this time to reflect and plan more engaging distance learning methods to avoid student burnout and encourage students to remain enrolled for the remainder of the semester. We hope that the Faculty of CUNY will closely comply with the Chancellor's pause on distance learning during this recalibration period so that we are collectively, as a university, striving for a more equitable institution. Feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions, comments at my email address chairperson@usscuny.org. Best of luck with the remainder of the year and stay safe!

Yours in solidarity,

Timothy Hunter

University Student Senate Chairperson and CUNY Trustee