

March 6, 2020

MEMORANDUM

To: SUNY Chief Academic Officers
From: Tod A. Laursen, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor
Subject: Continuity of Academic Programming (COVID-19)

Thank you for your leadership in providing continuity of academic programming for your students—whether for the early return of students studying abroad, students for whom upcoming travel abroad has been postponed, students subject to quarantine, and/or requests for accommodation from students with underlying health conditions. I know that many of you have been holding active planning meetings on this topic or are planning to do so. I am writing today to highlight possible delivery options, related resources and System supports, and ask that you designate a lead contact for continuity of academic programming.

First, I know that our shared priority is for each student to be able to complete courses initiated at the beginning of the term. In the case of study abroad, the international host institution may be able to continue providing instruction remotely. In the case of isolation, quarantine or other accommodation requests (and/or where an international host institution itself is closing or unable to assist), there will be a need for additional SUNY faculty support. Addressing student academic needs will require campuses to draw upon existing mechanisms and, in some cases, introduce local flexibilities.

Related to this, earlier today the New York State Education Department distributed a [memo](#) that outlines, at the state regulatory level, guidance about flexibilities in providing academic programming. Also the Federal Student Aid office of the U.S. Education Department also issued [guidance](#) in response to questions related to comply with Title IV, Higher Education Act (HEA) policies for students whose activities are impacted by Coronavirus (COVID-19).

The guiding principle in providing continuity of academic programming is to offer learning opportunities in the least-restrictive manner that maintains intended student learning outcomes. As related to study abroad, each campus should work with their partner institution where possible to provide opportunities for students to complete courses for which they are already registered. For any New York-based students who become subject to quarantine or seek accommodation, the goal remains to provide opportunities for continuity of current courses.

Options for facilitating that continuity include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Distance Learning, including 'low-interaction' activities such as connections via phone/conferencing systems such as [Zoom](#) or [Webex](#) and exchange of work via Blackboard and/or email;

- Independent Study, as an individual student or combined group of students, for both online and residential;
- Experiential Learning, including via simulated/virtual experiences;
- Online Learning, moving to online those SUNY Courses that are not being taught online now; this could be considered for both campus courses and for study abroad courses;
- Assigning an “Incomplete” grade with opportunity to complete course requirements in conjunction with a future section of the course, without requiring registration and payment;
- Placing students in open seats of campus-offered courses (suggested as a last-resort, or to be offered in combination with other options from which students may select); and
- Collaborating with other SUNY campuses on any of the above, to share faculty resources and address student needs.

We understand that not all faculty may be familiar with the full set of tools to take advantage of these delivery options. There are some existing resources available (SUNY Purchase: [Teaching during campus closure](#), Stony Brook University: [Keep Teaching](#)) and more will be available in the coming days, including a checklist from the SUNY Online team.

Note that Blackboard is hosting a related webinar on Tuesday, March 10: Register for the “[Preparing to scale online teaching and learning during Coronavirus.](#)” According to their e-mail invitation, the session will “provide suggested practices and share experiences from other institutions who have transitioned to online during times of crisis.”

So that impacted students are able to navigate the available options, each campus should identify an academic program point of contact. The point of contact may need to liaise with campus study abroad officers and partner institutions (e.g., to retrieve the documentation needed to confirm academic progress in a study abroad program). They may also need to interact with System staff and be the lead in reaching out to other SUNY campuses for support. Please send your COVID-19 Academic Programs Contact information (name, title, email) to: provost@suny.edu.

We understand that some campuses have not yet seen any impact from COVID-19. I still ask that you take action now to review and update continuity planning at both the course and program level. This would include identifying:

- Ways in which students can complete courses and other degree requirements in the event of an extended absence or campus closure; and
- Ways to maintain faculty coverage of courses and program requirements in cases of faculty absence.

Of course, please continue to monitor SUNY’s Health Alerts webpage (<https://www.suny.edu/health-alert/>), State and Federal websites for up-to-date information, guidance and instructions concerning COVID-19 (the coronavirus), including any protocols concerning faculty, staff, and students on campus:

- New York DOH: <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>
- Center for Disease Control guidance for higher education institutions: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities.html>

Finally, we have designated contacts here at System to help support with academic program continuity:

- Academic Programs: David Cantaffa, Associate Provost for Academic Programs, Planning, and Assessment, david.cantaffa@suny.edu
- Distance and/or Online Learning: Kim Scalzo, Executive Director of Academic Technologies, kim.scalzo@suny.edu
- Study Abroad: James Pasquill, Director of International Programs, james.pasquill@suny.edu

Thank you again for your continued leadership.