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Subject: A Message to Faculty and Students from Provost Ann E. Cudd



Dear Pitt Faculty and Students,

In my message to the University of Pittsburgh community in January, as we celebrated the launch of a new decade and the start of the spring semester, I talked about the strong spirit of collaboration and community that exists across all Pitt campuses.

Then, COVID-19 intruded into our collective experience, and a great deal seemed to change nearly overnight, at the University and in our lives. But I have continued to see that same spirit of collaboration and community hard at work within every member of our Pitt family throughout this very changeable, sometimes scary, time.

These first five days of meeting in virtual classrooms have shown us some pretty amazing things. For instance, 5,000-plus courses have transitioned to a remote format. And more than 1,400 faculty members have participated in online workshops and remote office hour sessions provided by the University Center for Teaching and Learning. From what I have heard and experienced (including conducting my first all-virtual dissertation defense), this week has been relatively smooth—though no road is without its bumps. That said, from Zoom to Canvas, to Blackboard, Panopto, discussion boards, and the phone, your ingenuity and resilience are prevailing.

The speed at which you had to undertake the transition to remote learning has required flexibility, creative thinking, and a serious time commitment beyond anything we have seen before. This has been a huge lift. I am so pleased to see students, faculty, and staff working together as we adapt to this temporary “new normal.”

This would not have been an easy shift under the simplest of circumstances, but to make it while experiencing the stresses and uncertainties of a pandemic is an incredible feat. I truly appreciate the support you have all given one another, your shared commitment to forge ahead, and your willingness to “figure it all out” together. Thank you so much.

We can all be incredibly thankful, too, for the huge amount of work put forth by the [University Center for Teaching and Learning](#) and [Pitt IT](#) to help make the transition easier for everyone. Please continue to reach out to them for training, resources, and support. And remember that the [24/7 Pitt IT Help Desk](#) is always here for you.

Also, as you continue teaching, learning, and researching, the University Library System has an exceptional array of [remote resources](#) to assist you. I want to thank the faculty and staff of the libraries for their extra efforts at this time to solve problems and enhance access to the materials you all need to continue your essential teaching and research missions.

Students, your advisors remain an excellent resource for you as well; they are ready to assist by sharing virtual resources and helping you realize your plans for the future. There are many ways students and advisors can meet remotely, and many advisors have already reached out to meet with students via Skype, Zoom, Teams, or phone. If you or your advisor have questions, please [email the Office of the Provost, Undergraduate Studies](#).

Faculty members and students have asked me about our summer session plans. We have made the decision to deliver summer courses remotely, with the possibility of a few exceptions for clinical or field experiences that may become possible later in the summer. While we would certainly have liked to return to in-person classes, it is not safe or feasible given the circumstances and time frames we face. We will have more details to share about summer very soon.

Less certain is how long we must stay committed to the practice of social distancing. I know it isn't an easy assignment, but it is absolutely necessary to try to decrease the spread of COVID-19. By taking distancing practices seriously, we will keep the health and wellness of our Pitt community—and our surrounding communities—at the top of our priorities list, even as we move our commitment to academic excellence forward.

Please continue to watch [Pitt's COVID-19 Response page](#) for the latest University updates and to find dedicated pages with information and FAQs specifically for undergraduate students, graduate students, researchers, and faculty members.

As we take care of our physical well-being, it is equally important to take care of our psychological needs. The most important things you can do are to stay engaged and in touch with others. Explore opportunities for mentoring, networking, and connecting with people in the Pitt community through [Pitt Commons](#). Dig into your classes and participate in online activities that your schools make available. Connect with family and friends using Zoom or your phones. Volunteer to help provide vital services if you are able. And don't hesitate to reach out for support. [Counseling services are available online](#) for Pitt students; [Life Solutions](#) stands by to assist any faculty and staff members in need.

During the days and weeks ahead, we will continue to experience uncertainties and lean on each other through them. Our academic lives, in all their dimensions—though changed—are not diminished. In your work this week, you have set the path for continued progress and accomplishments, one course at a time, one determined individual at a time. I am so proud and thankful to be surrounded (virtually, at this moment) by all of you. We will get through this together.

Stay healthy—and Hail to Pitt!

Ann E. Cudd
Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor