

Heller Town Hall Wednesday, April 1, 2021 Q&A

I. Return to Campus in the Fall

Question: Will all subjects/study areas have a chance for in-person classes, or just some areas? Will classes be live-streamed, or will there be dedicated remote vs. in-person options?

Answer: The fall will be a transition semester. Many of the pandemic restrictions are likely to still be in place, e.g., masks, social distancing, and COVID-19 testing. We will be in-person but we are planning on contingencies and accommodations in case we are not fully back. If we will need to maintain only 50% capacity in our classrooms, this changes how we can teach, and we will not know what the situation will be until closer to the start of the semester. We anticipate that all Heller programs will operate with the same or similar levels of in-person instruction, with accommodations for students who need to continue remote learning.

We envision that, for any given class, most students will be in the classroom and others will join remotely. It will be challenging for faculty to teach in that mode, but they will learn techniques for dual-mode teaching, and we are updating technology in the classrooms so that all students can be heard, whether they are in person or joining online.

Question: If students cannot return to campus in the fall but want to continue online in dual mode, are there specific steps they will need to take?

Answer: We are in the process of determining how this will be handled. In general, policies around accommodations will be handled at the university level. We will keep the community informed so that students and others are able to make adequate plans and informed decisions.

Question: In response to the above question, to whom do we communicate our status?

Answer: Students in the MS-GHPM, MA-SID and MA-COEX programs should communicate with Dr. Sandra Jones, Executive Director of Global Programs (jones@brandeis.edu). Students in the MPP, MBA and PhD programs should communicate with Ravi Lakshmiathan, Assistant Dean, Academic and Student Services (kanthan@brandeis.edu).

Question: Does the fact that Heller was a testing site have anything to do with the decision to remain remote last fall and this semester?

Answer: No. The decision about returning to campus was based on the 'facts on the ground,' i.e., public health data and the capacity of Heller classrooms, offices, meeting rooms and other public areas to accommodate students, faculty and staff while maintaining safe social distancing protocols.

Question: What steps are Heller staff taking to ensure that graduate students will be able to find affordable and safe housing options? What options are available for students who only have one semester of coursework to complete who don't necessarily need a full year lease and might struggle to find a fall sublease option?

Answer: We are currently thinking about this issue. We have heard from some students whose last semester is fall 2021, that they would like to come back to complete their final semester at Heller. Others have voiced concerns about not being able to secure a half-year apartment lease to return for one semester. Heller has been working with the Brandeis Graduate Student Affairs Office to make sure students have access to information about housing in the greater Boston area.

Question: Something that has come up and become highlighted through COVID is how disconnected and alienated the different graduate schools/programs are at Brandeis. What work is being done by faculty and staff to build community across the Brandeis graduate experience, and perhaps greater Boston graduate experience?

Answer: There is a graduate school team, composed of members from Heller, IBS and GSAS, that meets regularly to discuss issues important to graduate students in an effort to advocate for them and build shared experiences. The 21-Day Challenge and the Dr. Eddie Moore, Jr. event are some examples of that. There is a plan to roll out a more integrated set of experiences for Brandeis graduate students, including dedicated space for graduate students on campus in the fall. HSA representatives and other student groups will be included in the planning. To date, there has not been a focus on creating shared experiences with graduate students at other area universities, but it is a great suggestion, and that idea can be added to future planning.

II. **Spring & Summer 2021: Commencement, Practicums, Vaccines, Campus Tours**

Question: How did Heller go about making the decision to lessen breaks this semester? Specifically, was the decision highly influenced by the undergrad decision or can Heller make a decision separated from the undergrad?

Answer: The decision on reducing breaks this semester was made at the university level, primarily responding to public health concerns about the pandemic. In order to reduce potential exposures in the peak November-January months, Brandeis extended the intersession to include all of January. This required reducing the number of breaks during the spring semester and also reducing the potential spread from travel during the semester. As then [Provost Lisa Lynch](#) explained: "There will be no February week-long break, and we will have a reduced Passover break. There will be no classes on Feb. 15, March 9, March 29 and April 2. Although we know you may be understandably disappointed with the loss of weeklong February and Passover breaks, we have seen this semester how important it is from a public health perspective to limit travel." As with many aspects of the pandemic, we know the reduction in breaks has been a hardship for students, faculty, and staff. But it was a necessary step given the larger public health concerns.

Question: Could someone please speak to why our graduation is being held at 8am on a Monday? (Monday, May 24) A full year ago I shared with my family the Sunday date and travel plans were made to be together. I'm also confused as to what pieces of the "Main" Brandeis graduation are relevant to Heller students?

Answer: The university decided to hold commencement over three days: Sunday, May 23 through Tuesday May 25, due to the technical support that is needed for departments to hold complicated virtual events at such an immense scale. We chose a time that worked best for our community, though we recognize there is no single time that works for everyone. The 8:00 AM time allows for the most people to participate, given the various time zone differences. We realize this is not ideal. Marc Kiredjian and Ravi Lakshmikanthan are heading the commencement planning team, and will focus on community engagement as a significant part of our celebration. Student voices will be included in the planning. Details about that as well as logistics and the agenda for commencement will be forthcoming.

The main Brandeis Commencement ceremony will be on Sunday May 23 at 10:30 am and all are welcome to attend. This will include a commencement speaker ([announced this week, acclaimed attorney Bryan Stevenson](#)) as well as an undergraduate and one graduate student speaker.

Question: For students who are planning to do practicums, when will we be notified about updates/exceptions to Brandeis's travel restrictions policy?

Answer: There is a steering committee at the university level looking at travel policy for graduate students who have to travel for practicums. The university has posted travel policies on the [COVID-19 response webpage](#), but the travel needs of graduate students will be handled on a case by case basis. Guidance on travel for graduate students with practicums and internships is under development and will be shared as soon as possible - most likely in the next few weeks.

Question: Is the university providing safe transportation to vaccine sites? Especially with commuter rails being limited or not running at all?

Answer: On April 8, 2021, Provost Fierke notified the Brandeis community of plans to offer transportation to the Natick mass vaccination site for students who have appointments. See the [vaccination page](#) of Brandeis' [COVID-19 Response website](#) for more information about obtaining COVID-19 vaccination. CVS and Walgreens are now offering vaccinations and those locations are easily accessible to our Brandeis campus via the shuttle service. Our shuttle schedule has been adjusted to coincide better with the bus schedule, and the shuttle now runs to South Station twice in the morning and twice in the evening due to the commuter rail situation. Brandeis is working hard to get a COVID-19 vaccine clinic on campus. The health center is set up to receive doses and the extensive paperwork has been completed. As of now, Brandeis has not mandated that students and others in the community receive the vaccine in order to come to campus, but the university strongly encourages all community members to get vaccinated. The Passport system now makes it possible for individuals to upload their vaccine card into the portal. Vaccinated individuals will still need to follow the COVID-19 testing protocol.

Question: Will current graduate students be able to do the campus tours for admitted students since some of us have yet to go to campus and don't know where things are?

Answer: Heller Admissions is not offering campus tours at this time. There is a virtual campus tour: <https://www.brandeis.edu/admissions/common/tour.html>. The current tours being offered for admitted students are through Undergraduate Admissions. Current, active students are always welcome to come to campus, provided that they follow all protocols relating to Health and Safety and maintain a Green Passport.

Question: Are library facilities going to be fully accessible in the fall?

Answer: Fall plans for the library are currently being made. Information will be shared soon.