

Heller Town Hall Q&A, October 21, 2020

I. ONLINE AND HYBRID TEACHING / LEARNING

Question: Please explain plans for instruction in the spring. Are there any plans for “hybrid” learning, or will we be fully remote for the spring? Some graduate schools are offering in-person (“targeted hybrid”) for international students with visas.

Answer: There is a series of rules that dictate what international students can do and how much online coursework they can take. These rules have been in place for almost 20 years and, normally, they do not present much of a challenge. However, the situation has changed due to the pandemic and, last spring, some of those rules were waived. Over the summer, after mixed messages from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a settlement was reached for the fall. We expect new rules to come out for spring and we anticipate they will require some hybrid and in-person opportunities for international students to keep their visas. We will be in full compliance to ensure all students can keep their visa status.

The good news is that some new international students have received their visas and will be joining us in the spring. When they arrive, we know you will help us welcome them to our community and help get them acclimated.

In the spring, Heller will offer targeted hybrid opportunities for international students who are living locally. However, the primary mode of instruction will be online and every class will be accessible remotely. In person opportunities at Heller will be small gatherings with proper public health protocols, e.g., masks, remaining six feet apart, etc. An example of an in-person event this semester is an upcoming student lunch with the dean. In the spring, we will continue to reference the facts regarding the state of the pandemic and adjust our in person offerings based on what is possible within the limits of public health and safety concerns.

Question: I have had a diverse range of class experiences this semester, and my best and most effective classes have taken a creative, alternative approach to presenting material, teaming, group work, etc. For the spring semester, will this be encouraged of professors, rather than traditional teaching/classroom styles?

Answer: Yes, this will be encouraged. Brandeis’ Center for Teaching and Learning will again offer their curriculum for the Hybrid Teaching Institute, which has been updated with the feedback from students this semester. The CTL and the Heller academic programs are compiling many of these best practices and discussing them in program meetings, faculty retreats and peer-teaching teams.

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

Answer: No. The decision about how the Heller School would operate in the fall was grounded in extensive discussion that began well before the decision to make Zinner Forum a testing site. Our main objective was to balance the responsibility to both deliver on our academic and research missions while keeping the community safe. This principle continues to guide us. When the university sought a location to do testing, Heller's decision to operate remotely meant we would have a reduced level of activity in the building. This was one of the factors that made Heller a good testing site, in addition to foot traffic flow on the ground level and the outdoor space on the patio. I was pleased to make the Heller School available for this purpose. This is one way we contribute to larger public safety efforts.

Question: Is it possible to discuss and adjust class scheduling? I feel really strongly that if certain classes were Tuesday/Thursday for an hour and a half rather than one day for 3 hours, comprehension and in-class discussions would improve.

Answer: We understand that there is a range of opinions about this issue. We are always considering how we can deliver course content more effectively and, in a virtual setting, we are very cognizant of the challenges presented by three-hour classes. Changing to a format of two 90-minute class times per week does not reduce the screen time; it just disperses it. Additional reasons to maintain the three-hour blocks include the value of in-depth conversations at Heller and a desire to help students maintain a school-life balance. Moving to two 90-minute classes would result in longer days (8:00 am to 8:00 pm) and reduced free time. This would adversely impact family time and time available to work for income. Moreover, several of our adjunct faculty are active experts in their field and cannot commit to teaching twice a week, potentially causing some of our courses to be cancelled. Overall, our class schedule is complex, in particular due to the scheduling needs of our dual and joint degree programs. Restructuring our time blocks would increase the incidence of class time conflicts for students. Heller faculty are encouraged to give multiple breaks when possible during a three-hour class.

II. REGISTRATION, GRADING AND TUITION

Question: When we can start registering for spring courses?

Answer: We are working on finalizing the spring schedule and we anticipate having a draft by the end of November. Students will be able to register starting on or about December 16. Registration will continue through February.

Question: Given everything Dean Weil discussed with the ongoing challenges of the pandemic and political/social context, why is there not an option for Pass/Fail?

Answer: The decision not to offer a pass/fail grading option was made at the university level. Last spring, this issue was discussed among the deans (including Dean Weil) and provost. Our shift to an online mode required faculty to make rapid and significant adjustments to their teaching. To facilitate students' adaptation to this change, the pass/fail option was offered in the spring semester. This fall and this coming spring, the

university has chosen not to offer a pass/fail option because faculty have made adjustments to their teaching methods.

We want all students to be successful. Students who are experiencing difficulty with their coursework, or who need accommodations, should reach out to [Student Accessibility Support](#) or talk to their program administrator.

Question: This summer tuition could be paid at any time and there was no penalty. I don't think this was the case for the fall semester. Will there be a hard deadline for the spring tuition payment?

Brandeis Student Financial Services has shared the following information with us about Spring billing:

Spring Bill Due Date

Given the adjustments to the spring academic calendar, we are adjusting the due date for spring semester bills to January 15, 2021. We plan to provide electronic bills to students via the Student Account Center, which can be accessed by clicking the "View Account or Manage Payments" link in the Sage Student Center, by the middle of December.

While the spring tuition due date is January 15, 2021 please keep in mind that payments must post to a student's account before December 31, 2020 to be included on the 2020 1098-T Tuition Statement. The 1098-T is a document used in conjunction with families' federal tax filings. The timing of when payments are received may have an impact on 2020 federal taxes.

Payment Plans

To give students more payment flexibility, we are offering both a 4-month and a 5-month payment plan option for the spring term. For the details of these plans, please visit our payment plan [page](#).

Insuring your tuition

As in past years, Brandeis has partnered with GradGuard to offer tuition insurance by Allianz Global Assistance. The insurance coverage expands the scope of our refund policy by allowing for up to full reimbursement for tuition, room and board, and other fees for covered withdrawals (a COVID diagnosis would be included) at any time during the semester. For more information about this plan, please go to the [Brandeis GradGuard site](#).

III. STUDENT EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER

Question: What does the hiring freeze mean for student positions such as research positions?

Answer: The hiring freeze does not apply to student employment. We are actively hiring students for research and other positions at Heller and across campus.

Question: I am sure that Benny will have more to say on the job search, but I understand that the vast majority of jobs are found through networks, which you can build out with informational interviews, internships, field projects, and other forms of engagement with prospective employers. This can all be done during the pandemic.

Answer: Connecting to opportunities in this time of COVID-19 is challenging and will remain so for some time. The complex part is that many organizations are still grappling with uncertainty related to hiring and onboarding staff for jobs and internships. Others are still hiring, but are cautious about large scale promotion of the opportunities they have. The good news, according to the most recent career/outcomes report put out by the Heller Career Development Center, is that students are connecting to opportunities. Some may be taking longer than usual, but they are definitely finding their way.

The Heller School Career Center delivers a variety of career programming, covering everything from resume development and networking to exploring opportunities across different industries. They also offer opportunities to network with alumni and employers. To view the remaining programs for the semester, [please click here](#). Be sure to look out for the weekly newsletter, which will have an outline of all programs and other valuable resources and information. Additionally, you can always log onto [Handshake](#) to view and register for the most updated programs.

One of the best ways to develop a strategy for your job search is to set up a career advising meeting. Meeting with a career advisor will help you identify your core interests and skills and develop a clear and structured approach to take your next steps. Log onto Handshake to set up an appointment or contact the [Career Development Center](#) to learn more about the resources available.

IV. BLACK ACTION PROGRAM

Question: What is Heller's response to the Black Action Program and adapting to the impact of COVID-19 and police brutality, which disproportionately affects people of color and those with low income. For example, more funding for the graduate food pantry, pass/fail class option, leniency on class participation.

Answer: The students who are leaders in the Black Action Plan have met with the deans, provost and president and these meetings will continue. Our current and planned strategies, as described by Associate Dean of Equity, Inclusion and Diversity, Maria Madison and Dean David Weil ([here](#)), are informed by the Black Action Plan and by students engaged with the work, particularly the work of those bringing the concerns of graduate students.

Heller is part of the search committee for the university's new head of public safety. That committee is expressly charged with rethinking what public safety means and the role public safety officers should have, versus other resources. A number of Heller students and faculty are members of that committee. A Heller alumna also serves as an external consultant to the committee.

For information on food pantry and resources, visit the [Graduate Student Affairs page on Food Resources](#). Students should be in contact with their faculty members and program administrators if there are issues or concerns that would impact their class participation.

V. STAFF LUNCH WITH THE DEAN

Question: Are there any plans to hold an in-person staff lunch with the dean?

Answer: This is a wonderful idea and the Dean would be delighted to do that and we will look into making this happen.