

March 16, 2020

Dear Union community:

As we are all aware, this has been a time of extraordinary stress, which has already required making significant changes in the delivery of courses online, residential life, and dealing with almost daily impacts on everyone's sense of health and well-being. In response to numerous student and faculty questions, Pres. Jones, Executive VP Davie, the deans and faculty leaders from the AAC and Faculty Steering Committee, and other key administrators met this morning to address students' heightened academic stress and concerns. Important factual information including Department of Education regulations and policies, financial aid implications, and accreditation guidelines were reviewed, and we are assured that we have flexibility to make adjustments to our usual semester schedule and requirements. Proposed changes were then discussed this afternoon with the Student Senate Co-chairs, resulting in a few further adjustments.

Please be assured that it is our intention as Union faculty and administration that NO ONE WILL FAIL or be penalized because of the coronavirus! We will do everything in our power to help you work through difficulties and to complete the semester successfully! We ask that students communicate with your faculty, with the Dean of Students, and with the Academic Office, so that we can assist you in solving individual problems.

Here are the changes we are putting in place, all of which are intended to lighten the load of both students and faculty, and to create more flexibility around academic requirements through the end of the semester. Please read these carefully.

- ***Spring Recess is extended by a week to Friday, March 27.***
- ***The last day of classes has been extended from May 4 to May 6.***
 - o Tuesday, May 5 is makeup day for classes cancelled on Monday, March 9.
 - o Wednesday, May 6 is makeup day for classes cancelled on Tuesday, March 10.
- ***The final submission date of MA theses, MDiv final projects/theses, and STM extended papers to readers will be extended by 3 weeks, from April 3 (original deadline) to Friday, April 24.***
- ***Final grades for graduating seniors*** are still due *from faculty* to the registrar by 10:00am on Monday, May 11. Faculty may set their own deadlines for completion of coursework by graduating seniors with that deadline in mind. Students requiring extra time because of disability accommodations or other extenuating circumstances should be in touch with their faculty and the Dean of Students to make necessary arrangements for an extension. If all work cannot be completed by seniors in time for grades to be submitted on May 11, there is an option to graduate after the end of Fall semester 2020.
- ***The deadline for coursework for non-graduating students will be extended to Friday, May 15.*** The deadline for faculty to submit final grades to the registrar for non-graduating

students has been extended to **Friday, June 5**. Students requiring extra time because of disability accommodations or other extenuating circumstances should be in touch with their faculty and the Dean of Students to make necessary arrangements for an extension.

· ***All courses, including guided readings, will be changed to Pass/Fail as the default grading system.*** If a student needs to be awarded traditional Union grades rather than P/F, they should notify the registrar as soon as possible but no later than the last day of classes, May 6. This information will be reported to faculty by the registrar as soon as possible, after May 6. Student grades originally registered for certain courses as Audit and Reading Credit will remain the same. Our accreditors have assured us that this exception to our normal grading practice can be granted. **A notation will appear on transcripts indicating that all standard courses were changed to Pass/Fail this semester due to the coronavirus emergency.**

· ***The withdrawal deadline has been extended to Monday, May 6 (last day of classes) which means students have until this date to drop a course with a grade of “W.”*** A grade of “W” is not an academic deficiency. Students are encouraged and welcomed to reach out to their faculty advisor or the academic office to discuss the impact of a course withdrawal. Our financial aid office has assured us we can file appeals should this cause potential negative impact on federal aid, and students should not be penalized financially for this. **This will be noted in your permanent record as due to coronavirus policy changes.**

· ***Students completing CPE or field education whose clinical hours have been affected are expected to contact Dr. Su Pak to discuss meeting their graduation requirements.*** The Field Education office will work with you to make necessary arrangements for you to receive credit.

· ***Graduating students (MA, STM) who have not yet completed the language exam requirement should email the academic office for instructions for the exam to be administered on the honor system, via email.*** We expect that students who still need to meet this requirement will take the exam this April (watch for an announcement of dates and times soon). In the unlikely event that a student fails, the academic office will work with that student to ensure an alternative so that the student is able to graduate.

· ***There will no longer be formal reading days or a formal final exam period.*** This means the registrar will not request from faculty which courses are holding a final exam, and a schedule will not be developed and posted with standard three-hour exam blocks during the originally designated exam period. Final exams should be administered asynchronously, using a moodle dropbox or email for submission, and not synchronously via Zoom. Faculty can decide when and how to administer their final exam **or equivalent**, with the awareness of graduating student deadlines. Online participation throughout the semester will of course be taken into consideration as part of the overall final grade.

· ***No student will be penalized for technical problems accessing the online platforms.***

· ***With the closure of the entire Columbia library system including Burke Library, no student will be penalized for lack of access to library materials.***

· ***Summer classes are still expected to begin Monday, May 18 but will be conducted online;*** more information will be sent from the academic office to faculty teaching during the summer semester.

We hope all these adjustments will help lighten the load of both students and faculty. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask any one of us in the academic office. We will be happy to help you. And please know that we are here for you and working hard to make sure that your academic progress is not adversely impacted by the coronavirus. You are bearing an incredible burden and our desire is to share that burden so that you can go on to do the great work in the world that awaits you.

With care,
Dean Pam Cooper-White and Assistant Dean Nicole Mirando

--

The Rev. Pamela Cooper-White, PhD
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean
Christiane Brooks Johnson Professor of Psychology and Religion

Nicole Mirando
Assistant Dean for Academic Administration
nmirando@uts.columbia.edu

Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027

212-280-1558