

Message to Chairs: Further tips for helping our students

We hope this email finds you and your loved ones safe and well. You, along with your fellow Department chairs, have our admiration and appreciation for the tremendous efforts you have shown in the past six weeks in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our purpose of writing to you today is to share some information and developments pertaining to graduate studies and instruction. While this information may be known to some chairs, in our conversations with students we have found some breakdowns in communication that we hope our message will repair.

1. Consider expanding S/U options for graduate courses

Like all of our community, the pandemic has disrupted the lives of our graduate students. We urge every graduate program to consider how they can help their students through this crisis. Many of our graduate students face the duo stresses of being both students and instructors. One means to ease the burden is to use the changes in grading policy approved by the Academic Senate. Specifically, programs can expand the number of classes that students can take S/U as opposed to a letter grade. We strongly recommend that programs make this option available to students as widely as possible. Such an option gives students vital "breathing space." While we want to maintain our academic standards, we also need to create a culture of understanding that acknowledges the extraordinary demands on our graduate students.

2. Encourage asynchronous remote instruction

In general, our instructors and GSIs are doing an extraordinary job delivering instruction and assessment in a manner that accommodates the range of circumstances our students find themselves in. Our students are now located in different time zones, limited remote access, and/or extraordinary circumstances that preclude them from participating in real time. We ask for your help to encourage instruction in an asynchronous manner to help accommodate the challenging circumstances many of our students face.

3. Replace informal communication

The shelter-in-place order has rearranged how we communicate. Importantly online meetings and classes fail to allow the customary substantial word-of-mouth sharing of information. Thus, please be sure to direct people to sources of the latest information. For graduate students, current information regarding policies and resources are maintained on the Grad Division's Covid-19 website: [Covid-19 information for graduate education](#). The Senate is also posting resources and information at <https://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/issues/coronavirus>.

4. Encourage faculty mentoring

The pandemic and its aftermath have reshaped our world. For our graduate students not only is their academic progress interrupted but also their near-term career prospects are in jeopardy. We encourage our colleagues to reach out and do what they can to address our students' concerns. There is no way we can entirely buffer our students from the consequences of the pandemic, but even just listening can help!

We thank you profusely for all your tireless work preserving the instructional and research mission of our campus during these historic times. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



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