



## **5 Instructional Compassion and Equity Reminders** ***Showing Students Love in the Time of Coronavirus***

Compassion and equity aid in fostering resilience and respect for each other, especially in times of distress. Your students will benefit from knowing that you understand that high quality course content will only go so far if their well-being is not taken into consideration. They will also appreciate your cultural humility and recognition of the fact that it is impossible to know exactly what each student's life is like right now. As their instructor, you have the opportunity [to model what compassionate, equitable leadership](#) should be. Here are 5 reminders for the coming weeks.

### **1. Acknowledge the angst**

Let the first line of your next email be one in which you acknowledge that this is a scary and precarious time for them. It is ok to tell them if you identify with any of those feelings. You don't need to go into details, but students may be thinking about (and worried about) you, too. While some of the resources below may already be in your syllabus, this is a good time to remind your students of their options to reach out for help.

- You can assure your students that feeling scared or nervous is **valid and normal**, and that there is a support network of specialists in place available for them:
  - [University Counseling Center](#): 412-648-7930
  - [Care And Resource Support \(CARS\) Team](#): 412-624-5756
  - [resolve Crisis Services](#): 1-888-796-8226
- Students are likely experiencing disruptions in multiple areas of their lives, too. Social distancing and closures may affect their income, which can create financial stress and instability. Immediate solutions may come from reaching out to [The Pitt Pantry](#) and - more broadly - to [Pittsburgh's Community Food Bank](#).
- Students may have family and friends who become ill or even be tasked with caring for a loved one who is sick. For those connected to the UPMC network, it may be useful to know [how to request financial assistance with UPMC bills](#).

### **2. Consider their grieving**

A few of your students are also grieving the losses of specific experiences. Some of them will lose the ability to graduate on time or lose the final months of their senior year of college. Some will miss out on meaningful experiences with

mentors and friends. Be aware that there will be emotional grief during this transitional, uncertain period, which may go largely unacknowledged by most, since it will fall under the category of “limbo losses.” Consider asking your students if they are trying to exercise at home, or if they are limiting their exposure to the news. Your questions could be guided by the [CDC’s recommendations on how to take care of our emotional health](#).

### **3. Avoid “no place like home” talk**

Remember the concept of what constitutes a “home” is relative. For some students, Pitt is home, and their roommates are their family. Many students will return to unsafe living environments or simply can’t “go home.” It’s not always about financial limitations. LGBTQI+ youth are particularly vulnerable, as are international students, particularly those that come from countries that have already closed their frontiers in an effort to “flatten the curve.” Be willing to listen to students’ individual needs and be ready to share information about [organization-based resources](#). If any of your students must immediately depart, it could be helpful for them to be aware of [U-Haul’s free 30 day storage for students](#).

### **4. Be extra flexible**

Know that your students may be attempting to learn in environments where they will be interrupted and distracted, and they could benefit from the same considerations you extend to students registered with the office of [Disability Resources and Services](#).

Remote or online delivery of course content means heavily relying on technology. Be careful about how you talk about technology and any assumptions about what devices, and even level of internet connectivity your students may have to access learning. Pitt has a [24/7 IT Help Desk](#) that could be of tremendous help in dealing with technological challenges. Nevertheless, remain sensitive to the fact that the majority of your students are no longer on campus, and cannot rely on Pitt’s infrastructure (i.e., computer labs) and services (i.e., Hillman’s equipment borrowing of mobile devices).

Some students may be teaching or providing tutoring to other students as well. The dual roles can be very challenging and stressful. Consider reducing the load of their tasks, and point them toward resources that can help them feel better prepared, such as the [Teaching Center’s resources for instructional continuity](#).

## **5. Keep it simple**

Understand and appreciate that, just as you did not sign up to teach a remote or online course, your students did not sign up to be remote or online students. Focus on using technology that students are most likely to have access to (while offering work-arounds as needed) and delivering content that is most vital to achieving course learning objectives. Use the best scalable communication practices for your class: instructor presence in discussions, meaningful and timely feedback, individual contact via email, virtual office hours, and web conferences are all good ideas. Pick ones that will help you and your crew.

Finally, remember to ask about outreach efforts handled at the administrative levels of your own department, as well as broader community-oriented efforts. Referrals and extra help is something you want to mobilize and/or be aware of while remaining mindful of your own time constraints. Thank you so very much for all your work and your caring for students!