A Note from Dean Robin Kelsey  
March 10, 2020

Dear A&H Faculty and Staff,

By now you will have received the notices from President Bacow and Dean Gay about the need to conduct all courses remotely after spring break. Our students, with minimal exceptions, will not be in campus housing again until the fall, a measure necessary to protect our community and especially its most vulnerable members from the spread of COVID-19.

I recognize the profound challenge that this presents to our Departments and Programs and to all of you as individuals. The core pedagogy in our Division involves face to face interaction, and some of our courses are grounded in resources – studios, art supplies, equipment, ensembles, galleries etc. – to which students will lose access when they leave campus. I can imagine that initially some of you will feel at a loss about how to complete the semester through remote learning. There is no papering over the sad sacrifice of classroom time and the challenge of finding new ways to round out the term.

But, as Dean Gay has indicated, our students are counting on us. They are counting on us to stand strong in this time of uncertainty, to demonstrate resourcefulness and resilience, and to meet anxiety with assurance. Most of all, they are counting on us for their education. In the days ahead, those of us with an allergy to certain forms of technological mediation will need to learn how to use Zoom. Those of us who were planning to evaluate students based on projects using Harvard equipment or supplies, will need to think creatively about other forms of engagement and assessment. This is a major challenge, but I know from experience and student testimonials that you have the dedication and ingenuity to handle it successfully.

Over the last few days, as those of us in University Hall have struggled to determine the best way forward, my mind has returned time and again to our undergraduates and their profound emotional investment in their four fleeting years at Harvard. It is all too easy to imagine the disappointment at this turn of events, especially for our seniors. My hope is that one day our undergraduates, along with the rest of us, will look back on this time with pride, knowing that together we rose to a historic challenge that none of us could foresee. Our chance at this solace rests in large part on how we handle the contingencies now before us.

I have been thinking also of our graduate students, whose professional lives already bear so much uncertainty. Whatever you can do to support them would earn my lasting gratitude. In particular, I want to ensure that our Teaching Fellows, who will be facing unexpected challenges of their own, will not find themselves saddled with excessive responsibility for the adjustments we must all make in our courses. As Dean Gay has said, now is a time to take care of one another, and this precept applies especially to our relationship to the graduate students who teach under our care.

Those of us in the Office of the Dean of Arts & Humanities stand ready to help you in any way we can. In the meantime, please take advantage of the links in the messages from President Bacow and Dean Gay, and please consult our set of answers to Frequently Asked Questions that we have prepared for our Division. They will be updated regularly on our Divisional website.

With gratitude for your devoted service to our educational mission,

Robin