

Boston University Office of the President

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Dear Colleagues,

This letter is hitting your mailbox during an unprecedented time in the history of Boston University and the world caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time in history we are teaching all our classes online, and the vast majority of our undergraduate students are not on campus. As we walk our campus each day, it looks more and more like a ghost town, with our facilities standing idle, awaiting the return of our students. As we have stated in other communications, our responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are aimed at minimizing the health risks to our students, staff, and faculty, while working so that our students can successfully complete the spring semester.

We are now committed to completing the semester by teaching remotely. Also, we have asked our undergraduate students to return home, although we have kept some of our residences and dining halls open because there are students for whom it is not practical to go home. We expect to have approximately 1,000 in our residences, about ten percent of the normal occupancy, possibly for the remainder of the semester.

We have asked that staff supervisors work with members of their units to make it possible for most of our staff to work remotely, while making sure that our offices remain fully functional for our virtual students and others.

Finally, we want to take this opportunity to thank you for your effort, flexibility, and creativity while helping us navigate these unprecedented times; for faculty in adapting your classes to the new demands of remote instruction and student engagement, and for staff in assisting our faculty with this transition and for modifying the operations of your administrative unit to serve a remote student body. We know immense effort and thought have gone into these changes, while you are managing the well-being of your families and yourselves.

Originally, we had meant to write to update you in greater detail on other current and emerging academic developments and to offer our assessment about how we anticipate Academic Year 2020–2021 will unfold. There are a lot of exciting developments underway on our campuses, including the launch of the Faculty of Computing & Data Sciences, the opening of the expanded Howard Thurman Center, and the continuing growth of Innovate@BU. Our [new strategic plan](#) is in the final stages of development. Many of these initiatives have the common thread of fostering extensive collaboration and engagement across the University and among disciplines, departments, as well as schools and colleges. We believe Boston University is uniquely well-positioned to lead as a private research university, promoting research and education across

disciplines *and* communities of every kind.

Given the enormous disruption to the University, higher education, and society at large caused by the virus, we will devote the remainder of this letter to just two topics:

1. Admissions for Academic Year 2020–2021

2. Financial Planning for the Coming Year

Both touch on the potential impact of COVID-19 on the University.

Before turning to these topics we want to relay that the University has received word that our continuing accreditation by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) has been affirmed with no negative findings. This result is a tribute to everything that our faculty and staff do every day to ensure we deliver quality programs and services to our students. It is also a result of the outstanding effort on the part of our team of faculty and administrators who conducted our [self-study](#) and managed the NECHE site visit and follow-up. Sue Kennedy, Interim Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs, led this amazing effort.

Our NECHE result comes after last year's successful accreditation reviews of all three schools on the Medical Campus—the School of Medicine, the School of Public Health, and the Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine.

Admissions for Academic Year 2020–2021

The undergraduate admissions cycle for the next academic year is well underway. We received over 61,000 applications. Of these, more than 5,000 were for early decision, more than 8 percent over last year. Our offers for the regular admission cycle were announced on Saturday, March 21, and we are well positioned to welcome an excellent and diverse class in fall 2020.

Presently, this year's admissions cycle carries the greatest uncertainty we have ever experienced, in terms of our ability to operate as a residential campus, the recruitment of students, and their need for financial aid. It is much too early to know the impact of COVID-19 on campus operations in the fall, but it is becoming increasingly clear that the world will be in recession, which will negatively affect the ability of our students and parents to afford a Boston University education. One direct impact will be increased pressure on our financial aid budget.

Equally as challenging will be executing the final stages of undergraduate recruitment for which we are replacing our traditional on-campus Open Houses with virtual (online) tours and information sessions, supported by both the University and the schools and colleges. Our colleagues in Admissions have been preparing for this eventuality for over a month and they are ready. It is critically important that the schools and colleges put equal energy and creativity into this effort so that we can successfully recruit the class.

The same uncertainties that affect our undergraduate admissions also affect recruiting in our

graduate professional programs and doctoral programs. Successful recruiting is going to take creativity and extra effort.

On a hopeful note, our entering undergraduate class next fall will be the first for whom we meet the full demonstrated financial need of all domestic first-time undergraduate students. This large additional commitment of financial aid will make Boston University accessible to a greater number of talented and ambitious students.

Financial Planning for the Coming Year

Our increased commitments to undergraduate financial aid—to meet full need for all domestic undergraduate students with demonstrated need and our continuing commitment to meeting full need without loans for Pell Grant recipients—are major drivers for next year's budget. Together, they represent an increase in undergraduate financial aid by \$39 million to a projected total of \$327 million.

This increased expense, coupled with the funding needed for implementation of other ongoing initiatives, will leave us very little flexibility in next year's budget beyond a modest amount of new recurring funds allocated to the University Provost. Major funding commitments include support for the implementation of the third year of the BU Hub, support for establishing and expanding the Faculty of Computing & Data Sciences, and funding to purchase and bring online the new student information system, replacing our current legacy system. It also is essential that we continue to aggressively hire excellent new colleagues to fill open faculty positions.

Obviously, these financial plans have been developed before the impacts of COVID-19 are fully understood. It is clear that we will need to be more agile than usual to adjust to changing external conditions. To be prudent, we have frozen staff hiring and the initiation of any new capital projects until a clearer picture emerges of the impact of the virus on new admissions and retention of our students. Both of these decisions have been implemented to build financial reserves that could be used to bridge losses in revenue caused either by continuing closure, missing enrollment targets, or by increased demand for student financial aid due to job loss and loss of assets caused by the pandemic.

We also have established a committee reporting to the President to analyze the potential revenue impacts and possible levers for expense savings for the changing enrollment scenarios involving our spring, summer, and potentially fall semesters in 2020.

We will have a clearer picture of the impact by June 1, as our ability to operate during the summer becomes clearer, and enrollment patterns begin to develop for the fall semester, and, we hope, the upward trend in new COVID-19 cases abates.

Faculty hiring is continuing as planned. The quality of our faculty is the most critical element to the long-term success of the University. The academic hiring cycle is long and directly involves our peer institutions. Continuing this process with as little disruption as possible is key to maintaining the quality of the University. We are especially pleased that faculty searches are

already underway in the new Faculty of Computing & Data Sciences.

Even as we work our way through these uncertainties, we remain very optimistic about the future and about Boston University's role as a leading private research university. We hope that by fall we can return our attention to implementing the elements of our new strategic plan and continuing our progress as a leading private research university.

We hope you will follow the recommendations on our [website](#) about how to protect yourself against potential exposure to COVID-19. Please stay safe and healthy, and have a successful completion to the semester.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Brown
President

Jean Morrison
University Provost and Chief Academic Officer