

Communication re Covid-19 – Technical Support for Working Remotely

March 5, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

We are following up with my March 3, 2020, [email](#) to faculty regarding Covid-19. The Office of the Provost and Division of Administration and Finance have partnered with the Information Technology Division to ensure that all students, faculty and staff have access to the resources they need in the event that the college needs to hold classes or work remotely.

A. Teaching Remotely

The following are additional steps for preparing to teach remotely for a period of time:

- Please confirm that you can communicate remotely with all of your students.
- Immediately be sure you have the digital tools in hand that you need to conduct your class remotely in a minimally acceptable way, i.e. BlackBoard activated.
- Review your syllabus and consider how to account for a 2-3 week hiatus.
- At the next class meeting, review contingency plans with students:
 - Find out who does not have remote computer access or no smart phone or tablet.
 - Get students to put the BlackBoard app on their phones and then test it immediately.
- With each successive class meeting on campus, review any changes in plans and keep rolling the contingencies for assignments, quizzes, exams forward, as if that would be the last on campus class meeting for 2-4 weeks.

B. Recommended Resources

Below is a preliminary list of recommended resources to ensure that teaching and learning and collaboration can take place online.

Notification Processes: Lehman has an established approach for notifying the community in the event of college-wide operational issues. These include the use of [CUNY Alert](#), college-wide emails, a banner on the Lehman [home page](#), social media messages, notices on [Lehman 360](#), the main college phone line, and the mobile app. Please also note that Lehman's new [chatbot](#), while still a pilot, is a resource for answering many college-related questions, 24x7.

Departments have their own group email lists or listservs for internal communication, and faculty can contact students regarding class-related information via email, [Blackboard](#), [Lehman 360](#), or [CUNYfirst](#). Please remind students to regularly review their Lehman email account.

1. **Blackboard Resources for Faculty:**

- Blackboard - Learn more about how to use Blackboard to support student learning by reviewing [recommendations and resources](#) from the Office of Online Education. Faculty can also complete an online [self-paced Blackboard Basics tutorial](#).
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra is a video conferencing tool available from within your Blackboard course site. For those interested in meeting online in real-time with students, learn more about using [Blackboard Collaborate Ultra](#).
- Additional Blackboard resources can be found on the Blackboard [help page](#) and the [Lehman Blackboard page](#).

- Please note that certain assessments may need to be optimized to work well on mobile devices. A video guide is forthcoming.

2. Blackboard Workshops:

- As you may know, Blackboard “course shells” are automatically created for every Lehman course for which a student can register. Next week, we will hold the first of several workshops for faculty interested in activating their course shell as well as for those needing a refresher. Topics will cover ways to facilitate online instruction, how to post assignments and materials, how to use discussion boards, adding videos, and more.
- These workshops will be held in **Carman Hall, Room B-38** on **Monday March 9th** from 12 – 1 pm, **Tuesday March 10th** from 3 to 4 pm, and **Thursday, March 12th** from 11 am to 12 pm. Additional informational guides and instructional videos will also be posted for later viewing. Please contact Steve Castellano for more information or for support at stephen.castellano@lehman.cuny.edu.

Although many students have smart phones - and can view videos and content on a small screen - we need to be mindful that not all students have home computers; others may have limited wi-fi and data plans. The college is exploring ways to loan a very limited supply of tablets and laptops to students, if needed.

3. Resources for Faculty and Staff Departmental Collaboration:

- Microsoft Office 365 for Education – MS Office 365 is a robust collaboration suite provided by CUNY to all faculty and staff. Among the many available apps, “**Teams**” is especially useful as a shared workspace for video conferencing and team collaboration. “**OneDrive**” allows faculty and staff to store and share documents in the cloud. “**Forms**” is a lightweight resource to gather feedback and conduct surveys. Access [MS O365 here](#) using your CUNYfirst username and password. More information can be found on the [MS O365 for Education](#) support site.
- Video Conferencing – As mentioned above, [Microsoft Teams](#), via Office 365 provides useful video collaboration capabilities. Faculty and staff can also sign-up for a [no-cost Zoom basic license](#) with their Lehman email address. Please note that free licenses are limited to group meetings of up to 40 minutes and 100 participants. The college also has a limited number of Zoom Pro licenses (unlimited time for group meetings). These can be requested through the [Office of Online Education](#), subject to availability. CUNY Central is also exploring additional video conferencing solutions and we will update you as we obtain further information.

4. Other Resources:

- Lehman’s comprehensive [login page](#) includes links to the most widely used Lehman and CUNY resources.
- A wide variety of library resources can be accessed remotely via the [Library’s website](#).
- Find additional [CUNY digital resources](#) available for faculty, students, and staff.
- In addition to 100GB of online storage and sharing capabilities available on Microsoft [Office 365/One Drive](#), faculty and staff have unlimited online storage available on [Dropbox](#). Login with your CUNY credentials and please review the [Acceptable Use Policy](#) to ensure that online storage is not used for confidential information.
- Limited Virtual Private Network (VPN) connectivity is available for key offices that require access to office desktops, sensitive data, and listservs from off-campus. To ensure remote access, we encourage that all non-sensitive data be stored on CUNY’s Office 365 or Dropbox offerings, as noted above.

5. A Note About Accessibility:

- CUNY Blackboard is accessible to all students and faculty regardless of ability or situation. Blackboard complies with web content accessibility guidelines and Section 508 standards and functions with screen readers such as ZOOM and Browse Aloud. Ensuring accessible content will be reviewed in our workshops. Anyone requiring assistance may contact

stephen.castellano@lehman.cuny.edu. Microsoft Office 365 is also committed to [inclusive design](#) and has built accessibility checks into their products.

· Should you require additional support or assistance regarding the use of these or other technologies, please feel free to contact ronald.bergmann@lehman.cuny.edu or ediltrudys.ruiz@lehman.cuny.edu.