



June 26, 2020

Dear President Brown, Provost Morrison, and Dean Sclaroff,

We, the faculty of the Department of History, urge you to safeguard the health and welfare of the BU community by making it possible for all instructors – tenure-track faculty, adjunct faculty, and graduate teaching fellows – to decide whether to teach remotely or in person during Fall 2020 based on their own situation.

All of us recognize the threat that the pandemic poses to BU's financial health. We are all committed to ensuring the university's future and are united in our desire to teach in person. But we do not yet know many of the basic facts about this new disease or its long-term harmful effects on the health even of those who survive it.

Until then, however, we ask that you place the health and welfare of the BU community above these financial concerns. We are seriously distressed by the risks involved with reopening the campus, the danger that a mandatory return to in-person teaching poses to our most vulnerable faculty, the burden it places on those of us who must care for small children and other family members, and the peril it represents for students and staff.

Many risk factors associated with contracting the virus are beyond BU's control. Getting to campus every day, for example, will expose the entire BU community to increased danger. The university cannot ensure our safety on public transportation. Nor is there enough parking to accommodate all of those who would otherwise not drive to campus.

Other risk factors can be mitigated but not sufficiently brought under control. It was encouraging to hear, for example, of the university's proposed measures for containing the spread of the virus on campus, including regularly testing portions of the BU community, requiring students to wear masks, monitoring students' temperatures, and dedensifying classrooms.

However, these well-intentioned measures involve logistical problems that raise a variety of questions about their efficacy, from proper ventilation and the increased danger of droplet spread in enclosed spaces over long periods of time to dealing with non-compliant students. Given our experience with teaching, it is difficult to understand why we have not been consulted about problems that we know will occur.

Moreover, none of these measures regulate on-campus contact outside the classroom. The return to campus will bring students, faculty, and staff together on streets, in hallways, and on stairwells. As one of the foremost experts on adolescent risk-taking has pointed out, expectations that students will adhere to university protocols regarding health and safety are unrealistic. And regardless of our age, we all know that humans tend to reduce physical distance when interacting together, something that the desire to socialize after months of being locked down will only heighten.

All of us would prefer to teach in person. Interacting with our students personally is the reason that we went into this profession. The university's decision to transition to remote teaching last semester demonstrated to all of us why it is that we prefer to teach in person. None of us wants to teach remotely. Some of us will elect to teach in-person for exactly these (and other) reasons. And that is another reason to permit faculty the same measure of choice as students – to choose to “Teach *from Anywhere*.”

These concerns are in no way exhaustive. But even if they are primarily about teaching, we as faculty recognize that we are part of a larger community at BU. We are gravely concerned about the impact these policies will have on our graduate students. After all, they are teachers as well as students. Moreover, we want to underscore our solidarity with staff, without whose excellent work in providing key services and maintaining university facilities we could not teach to begin with. Pitting faculty against staff undermines the foundation of the BU community without providing any solutions to the crisis. On the contrary, we are determined to work with you to avoid negative consequences for all staff members.

The issues we have raised underscore the difficulties associated with mandatory in-person teaching and its impact on all members of the BU community. If BU reopens, an outbreak of the virus on campus is almost inevitable. And that would be disastrous for the people whose health

is endangered, greatly damaging to the university's reputation, and an existential threat to the university's financial future. For all of these reasons, we ask that you make it possible for us to decide for ourselves how best to take care of ourselves, our loved ones, our students, and our staff. We look forward to hearing your response to our concerns.

Yours truly,

The faculty of the Department of History at Boston University