April 2, 2020

Dear Graduate Students in the Department of Music:

I write as Director of Graduate Studies to touch base. Since we vacated campus in mid-March, I have corresponded with many of you individually, as well as with the graduating students. This time I am addressing all of you.

With the coronavirus pandemic, we are facing an unprecedented situation, which none of us asked for. In terms of your work as students, new issues and questions are arising continually. How will we conduct the final 310 colloquia? What happens to summer (and fall) research plans? What are the most prudent options for graduating students, who are facing a different landscape than a month ago? The Graduate School, together with the faculty and administration in our department, is working strenuously to anticipate and meet the needs that arise. You should know that the staff at GSAS has been exemplary — very thoughtful while strategizing at full-tilt.

Since we cannot see one another on campus, as we are accustomed, it is often hard to know what is happening, and I want you to be aware that Ingrid, Nancy, Eva, and I are tackling multiple graduate-student issues quite steadily. At the same time, the graduate advisors for our five programs have been meeting via Zoom.

During those sessions, we have discussed a wide range of issues. For now, I can report that we are planning to go ahead with the general exams, albeit in a different format and with different expectations. Very soon, current G-2 students will be receiving specific information from their program advisors.
To summarize broadly, the programs will conduct their own exams, as is normally the case, and they will stay on roughly the same schedule. Everything, including the oral exams, will take place digitally. Our goal is to be realistic about what is possible, especially with the libraries closed and students dispersed around the globe. We want to be flexible and humane, at the same time as we want to keep everyone on track towards completing degrees.

For the same reason – to stay on track – we are asking G-3 students to submit dissertation proposals for the May faculty meeting.

Meanwhile, those of you who are TF’s this semester have quickly achieved Zoom proficiency and adapted your sections accordingly. Thank you for the extra effort and creative strategizing that this unexpected development required!
Here are other updates:

- The graduate advisors, together with Nancy, are currently assessing funding needs for the summer and next year, and we will be in touch with detailed information before too long.

- Please be aware that, for this academic year, there is no limit on the number of mental health visits at UHS. Be sure to reach out if you feel the need.

- Lesley Bannatyne is sending regular departmental updates, as you know.

- On a lighter note, beer hour has been moved to Zoom and takes place Fridays at 4:00 PM (EDT).

In case you don’t already have the COVID-19 link from GSAS, here it is. The information there is continually being updated:
https://gsas.harvard.edu/coronavirus

Also, note the form for Emergency Funding from GSAS:
https://gsas.harvard.edu/financial-aid/emergency-funding

Plus the crisis link for the libraries:
https://library.harvard.edu/coronavirus

Finally, in this stressful time, it is essential to find ways to de-stress — to tend to your mental and physical well-being. In closing, I want to forward part of a message that Anne Shreffler sent to her advisees at the start of the current siege; there, she offers wise advice that can benefit us all:

The events of the last couple of weeks have been head-spinning, and I would imagine that the sense we all have of profound disorientation will continue for a while, sadly. I hope you are all settling in wherever you are. The highest priority right now for all of us is to be well, physically and mentally, and to take care of our families and loved ones. Whatever work we can get done - and for some, work may well be therapeutic - is a bonus.

But it won't be "normal." Folks, it can't be; the libraries are not open; there's no scan and deliver services; we can't access primary source materials; and we can't even talk to each other face to face. We're all under a lot of stress, which is perfectly understandable, given the circumstances.

Be kind to yourself.
I realize that this memo covers some issues but by no means all of them. Please feel free to reach out with questions and concerns by contacting me, Ingrid, Nancy, Eva, the program advisors, your individual advisors – whoever feels most appropriate to the question at hand. Our main goal – and here I include faculty and staff – is to be flexible in the face of a volatile and ever-shifting situation.

Take care,

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