

Student Town Hall Meeting online – Monday, March 23, 2020

To all SoA students: a Message from the School's Director (10 mins)

Dear School of Architecture Students,

Greetings!

This past week has ushered in unprecedented changes to how we operate as a university and school.

On March 20th, Governor Sisolak issued a third Emergency Directive. He has now officially directed all non-essential businesses (as previously outlined) in Nevada to close, effective since March 21st through to April 16th, 2020.

This affects the School of Architecture's staffing and building access. Our administrative assistants will not be in the office and UNLV campus is open only to provide essential services, i.e., Police Services.

UNLV President has closed all non-essential campus facilities, and our ARC Building with its studios, computer labs and workshops is closed at the moment at least until April 16th. At this time, the situation will be reassessed and a decision will be made if we can reopen facilities. All instructors were asked to stay at home and work from home for now.

This is a continuously evolving situation. As President Meana has directed, students and employees cannot be made to come to campus to work or meet at this time. Everybody has been asked to work remotely. Please be sure to abide by these rules.

I am thinking about you all, knowing that you are now receiving your instruction remotely, online, as we need to work at a distance to slow the spread of the Novel Coronavirus and protect everybody. Many universities in the United States have adopted a similar approach to delivering online instruction, so large numbers of students in the U.S. (and across the world) will be experiencing university life without face-to-face classes. This is a strategy that has been developed using the best knowledge and advice of our health professionals.

This online learning situation will be for the remaining Spring semester as well as for summer term teaching. An important aspect of this new approach to your education will be social distancing – which also means not meeting in groups during this time. We do not yet fully understand the consequences and “legacy” of this crisis that we currently have to deal with daily, but numerous experts say that it might be the beginning of a new era and the university will need to keep some aspects of online learning and working remotely for a long time.

I expect things to go back more or less to “normal” for Fall semester, but no one can really predict anything at the moment. This health crisis is an evolving situation, and we have to react to the threat as new information becomes available.

However, it's not all bad news.

For all of us in higher education, this challenge will open up new opportunities and a portal to some fascinating and creative possibilities.

So, how will we communicate if we cannot meet face-to-face?

Remote instruction will mainly be conducted through WebCampus/Canvas, recorded lectures (Panopto or Youtube videos or podcasts), Cisco Webex meetings, email, telephone conversations, and other methods of communication.

Again, we will mainly be using the Cisco WebEx tool to meet online and we hope that you may enjoy the inventive aspects of this online format. Instructors might also use the Zoom tool, but it has a disadvantage: Zoom is not integrated with Canvas and only allows meetings up to maximum 40 minutes, which is a little bit short. That's why we prefer the WebEx tool. WebEx is integrated in our teaching management software Canvas.

WebEx allows for videotaping and recording sessions to be shared. Meetings and classes can be recorded and then uploaded to the Cloud or posted to Canvas directly. All teaching materials, assignments, exams, etc. have been adjusted to accommodate our new situation, and our instructors will be staying in close communication with you to ensure that you can complete all of your classes on time.

Because student access to computer facilities on campus will not be possible for the rest of the spring 2020 semester, instructors are asked to not give assignments that require students to come to a campus computer lab to use specialized software.

If instructors have not already done so, they will communicate with you shortly the relevant information about how the course will continue from this point forward. At this point, there are no changes to the grading system or to the system for Upper Division applications.

Instructors may modify their syllabus, including assessments, using their experience and discretion on how to do this best (for example, requirements for the final crits/presentations), though the information about any revised plan should be communicated to students as early as possible.

If you have any questions about what is happening in each of your classes, check first with the instructor of a particular class for guidance. If that does not solve the issue, then send your question to the Program Coordinator, (for Architecture: Professors Deborah Oakley and Josh Vermillion; IAD: Dr. Dak Kopec; Landscape: Prof. Danny Ortega), or send me an email. We are always happy to be of help. We care about you very much and we are always there for each and every one of you, especially now.

We also wish to support your personal and psychological well-being, beyond your classes. A message was sent to you last Thursday which lists useful university resources that can help you through this unusual time, ranging from technology support to health concerns.

The university's updates on the Coronavirus situation can be found here:
www.unlv.edu/coronavirus

Please stay tuned to future emails from us and the UNLV leadership on this rapidly changing matter. And please remember, for the time being, avoid crowds, limit interpersonal contact, and always wash your hands!

We are here for you and we will get through this -- and learn a great deal as well -- together. I wish you all so well!

Steffen
Dr. Steffen Lehmann
Director, UNLV School of Architecture