

SAAA Meeting March 31, 2020, 12:30-1:30, via Zoom

**Call to Order** 12:33 pm

**Attendance**

Elected Members

Joanne Baird, SHRS  
Harvey Borovetz, Engineering  
Nancy Glynn, Public Health, Dept Epidemiology  
Marylou Gramm, Dietrich, Department of English  
Julius Kitutu, School of Nursing  
Susan Skledar, Pharmacy  
Sybil Streeter, Dietrich, Psychology  
Juan Taboas, Dental Medicine  
Susan Wesmiller, Nursing

Student Representatives

David Gau, Rep Post Doc Association  
Mailinh (Lynn) Dang, Student Government Board Representative

Staff Council

Tricia Connell, Staff Council Representative

Chancellor's Liaison

Kenyon Bonner, Vice Provost and Dean of Students  
Marc Harding, Chief Enrollment Officer  
Penny Semaia, Senior Associate Athletic Director for Student Life  
Jennifer Seng, General Counsel

Pro-tem

Robin Kear, University Library System

Senate Liaison

Gosia Fort, Health Science Library System

Office of University Communications

Donovan Harrell, University Times

**Agenda:** Student welfare at the University of Pittsburgh in the wake of covid19

**Speakers:**

Dr. Kenyon Bonner, Dean of Student Affairs  
Belkys Torres, Executive Director of Global Engagement at the University Center for International Studies (UCIS)  
Delores Blough, Director of the Office of International Services (OIS)

**Attachments:** Please find attached to the email, the PowerPoint Presentation by Belkys Torres, Delores Blough, and Kenyon Bonner to which our speakers refer in the following:

**Torres:** We are going to begin with a quick overview about study abroad programs, our international students, what we've been up against, and future planning (summer especially) referring to this PowerPoint, and then we can field questions.

First, study abroad, academic and financial accommodations in light of cancellations, travel bans, and evacuations.

Since January 2020, we have been working on all of this. When the pandemic began in China in mid-December, decisions and relocations began then. We didn't have student groups in China in January. So we began by cancelling three spring-break programs in China. At first, we planned to relocate the students to Singapore and elsewhere, but those plans fell through.

By Feb 28, we cancelled study abroad programs for 42 students in Italy, South Korea and Japan.

March 2, 31 students' programs were cancelled in France, Germany, and Spain.

March 17, 134 more students – in Australia, New Zealand, Latin America, Caribbean, some in other western European countries – were evacuated. Cancelled all summer programs. We were informed by the Department of State (which had raised its warning about travel to level 4) to keep US citizens at home. At the same time, our university cancelled international and domestic travel for faculty.

Throughout this time, CDC was issuing evolving information; we relied on doctors and medical experts on the ground, in country. We also have partners w/university also informing us about info in real time.

Then chancellor had to approve these decisions.

Gave students alert at least 1 week prior—e.g., all spring break programming cancelled a week prior.

We tried to give students assistance with airfare and other planning.

By March 22, all students were back home and instructed to return to permanent place of residence so they didn't have a double displacement by first coming to Pitt and then having to leave for home.

Total of 209 students were recalled and evacuated.

4 students got exceptional waivers due to being safer remaining in country abroad and staying there instead of returning to the U.S. Legal counsel and Provost had to approve.

Students were in different stages in their academic programs abroad. Some midway, some 1 week into their programs (for example in Japan). 180 are completing coursework remotely; 10 dropped b/c they hadn't begun and might add summer term courses instead. 20 still need to find academic accommodations because their host couldn't provide academic rigor in a virtual environment.

Pitt refunded all spring break, spring term and summer study abroad programs.

Reimbursed on prorated basis for students whose programs were underway.

Reimbursed incidental evacuation costs such as unanticipated new flights, baggage fees, meals during travel.

Reimbursed a few students housed in hotels because their parents work in the medical field and in order to continue delivering their medical services, they required the students not to come home (for social distancing) during the 14-day quarantine.

All students were instructed to contact Student Health Services and did.

**Blough:** We have had a lot of concerns from our international students all the way back in January, particularly Chinese students with their families back home.

Anxiety level higher than any other time. 9/11 anxiety tension similar. Travel bans big concerns, starting with China, Iran, etc.

We were trying to encourage international students to stay here during travel bans because they may have trouble returning to continue their education at Pitt in the fall. We told them to make the decision that you need to make, taking health and safety into account. A lot more students did go home. Hundreds of students are now in their home countries and presently cannot return. We hope by August that those travel bans will be lifted. Visa restrictions are also a problem. Normal visa processing is suspended, so at the minimum we expect delays for international students in the fall coming back in.

We routinely have to get the students forms for travel. U.S. government has been more relaxed about regulations such as, for the first time in 25 years, we don't need a blue original signature on a form. You can scan docs to students.

117 international students remain on campus. There are 350 overall students remaining on campus. Webinars and FAQs are on the websites on the PowerPoint with information to support these students on campus through the covid19 crisis.

We continue to get questions about various needs of students such as loss of internships at home and what they should plan instead for summer.

**Bonner:** We have provided a Pitt emergency fund for students with extenuating circumstances that need assistance. The fund has support from sources including philanthropic, alumni, and the provost's office, and is available for the entire student community. We have received 25 requests so far. It is available on the Student Affairs site: <http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/dean/student-emergency-assistance-fund/>. We are asking for additional contributions to that fund too.

**Kitutu:** Out of the 117 students, are there any graduate students, or are they all undergrad?

**Blough:** On campus students are all undergraduate. We don't have a great handle on number of graduate students in Pittsburgh area. We know there are more than 117. We don't know how many are off campus in Pittsburgh housing. We are trying to get that information by asking students to complete their housing form.

One of the other things that Student Affairs office and OIS are working on is ways to keep students that are here socially engaged and keep anxiety at a reasonable level.

OIS Pitt launched an International Facebook group last week—189 members so far. We are hosting online trivia nights; Netflix watch parties. Pitt's Global Ties has done informal chat rooms. We are sending out a survey requesting students' preferences for what they want to see us organize for social engagement. Counseling is planning peer support workshops for international students in particular.

**Gramm:** What accommodations is Pitt offering for international students to stay on campus this summer if they can't get back home due to travel bans or fear the inability of getting back to campus in August?

**Blough:** We are in discussions about this with Residence Life. We are trying to figure out how many students we're talking about. There is support for on-campus arrangements for whoever needs it.

**Gramm:** Can international students stay on campus this summer even if they are not enrolled in classes this summer?

**Blough:** There still needs to be a decision whether they would need to be enrolled in classes to stay on campus or not.

**Bonner:** International students who want to continue their education at Pitt should stay. I don't think classes would be a stipulation we would require. I don't see us imposing that on a student who could not return if they left. But we are not discussing bringing additional students onto campus.

**Gramm:** What kind of support do we have for international students who went abroad to return home and do not have access to our course websites due to lack of internet, firewalls, or other access problems? How should faculty members grade such a student who cannot finish the term due to these barriers?

**Bonner:** We have tech support for barriers. It's up to the school or department or faculty member.

**Blough:** I want to make clear that when OIS was encouraging international students to stay on campus, we told them they needed to take into account that if they decided to go back home, there might be difficulty completing classes.

**Streeter:** In meetings with Directors of Advising, we've asked for guidance re: G grades—extenuating personal circumstances.

**Borovetz:** I would like to ask about international graduate students, who I consider to be at significant risk. (Dr. Gau please jump in here.) RA or TA funding mechanism is their support for the most part. Is anyone reaching out to grad students? Or will this fall on individual departments and faculty?

**Gau:** I could say for grad students, I know PPSG has been trying to work on ways to connect to the grad student population. On post doc side, we don't know who needs help if they don't contact us. We're just sending out emails and GPSG is doing the same – regular messages.

**Borovetz:** Do you think students are aware of emergency funding for grad students?

**Gau:** Announcement came out yesterday, posted on university site, went to all Deans, and through student governing boards. And it is open to grad and undergrad. Nathan Urban's office has been reaching out to students as well. Also reaching out about health insurance. Some who haven't signed up for health insurance in the past in the U.S. can now do that.

**Blough:** Early on, OIS had reached out and had done surveys of all international students about what they anticipate their overall needs would be and some of them mentioned financial. And we'll go back to those students and suggest that they utilize emergency fund.

**Taboas:** Dr. Borovetz, are you asking whether GSAs are still being paid by departments?

**Borovetz:** I believe they are. But come May on day of graduation, I don't know what kind of stress or concerns they will have for future funding.

**Taboas:** A lot of faculty are seeking guidance on that and some kind of university decision.

**Bonner:** Are you referring to when their contracts conclude?

**Borovetz:** Yes.

**Blough:** The message we got from Urban's office is that departments will be encouraged to continue that funding through the summer. But beyond that, not sure.

**Gramm:** I don't want to stop the conversation about international students if there are more questions. But I would like to ask about the S/NC grading option for our students and how they pursue it, how much time they have to request it, and whether they have to justify their need of it.

**Streeter:** This took up the majority of the Directors of Advising meeting. University policy is that S/NC is not pass/fail. A grade of C or better is required for an S. Instructors will submit the earned grade [A+ through F] before deadline has passed [unless a student has already opted back in January for S/NC, in which case they can receive an S or NC].

Students will have some period of time [We learned after this meeting only 1 week\*] to submit a form to student records requesting the S/NC grade instead of the grade given by their instructor. All selections of S/NC will supersede depart requirements. I'm advising students to opt for letter grades if it's for an application for Pitt nursing school. Harvard Medical school will not accept S/NC. Law schools same. For Gen Eds, they might keep the D so they get the credit. No questions asked.

[\*Thank you to Sybil Streeter for the following information from April Belback, Director of Undergraduate Advising and Mentoring in the Provost's office, about grades submitted after our SAAA meeting:

“Students will only have one week following the posting of grades to pursue the S/NC option. For more info, go to <https://www.personalized.pitt.edu/snc-policy-students>

Students can join a [virtual town hall](#) on Thursday, April 2 at 3:00 p.m. where Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies Joe McCarthy and Vice Provost and Dean of Students Kenyon Bonner will be answering questions regarding academics and student life in Pitt's new virtual environment. Among other things, a key topic will be the S/NC grading policy.”]

**Taboas:** How can we disseminate this info to department advisors?

**Streeter:** I have a brief summary that I wrote up for my department that I can share after the meeting. One other point about the difference between P/F and S/NC: P/F means pass or fail which Pitt does not offer. With P/F, it means a D gets you a passing grade. With S/NC, S means C or better. Preprofessional programs are calculating an S as a C.

**Taboas:** In our school for grad students, it's a B or better

**Seng:** Our covid19 emergency site, includes all announcements including academic. There's an update about grading policy. Let provost know what details to add if missing. <https://www.emergency.pitt.edu/covid-19/undergraduate-students>

**Kitutu:** Joe McCarthy is holding meetings every day. We are still waiting for a statement on S/NC grading. Still waiting for a document to schools.

**Bonner:** Are you referring to granular details on S/NC ?

**Kitutu:** Yes. We have 117 students in residence halls. Summer is coming. They may want to enroll in classes but have no tuition. Is there any plan to help them with scholarships? Otherwise, we'll have guys hanging around.

**Bonner:** That's a relevant point that myself, USIC and Provost's office have to discuss about students here over the summer. I will also follow up with Joe about the S/NC questions, the details, and then also how do we get the high-level info out within the different areas of our schools.

**Taboas:** Kenyon, do you think at this time students will be able to return for fall semester?

**Bonner:** I'm hopeful that we will have a normal fall semester with welcome week. But I don't know.

**Harding:** We will have classes in fall 2020. What that looks like remains to be seen. The message is for students and parents, we will be open.

**Taboas:** What Marylou pointed out earlier for international students who don't have the ability to connect. It will be important to reach out to them, to make sure they can connect.

**Borovetz:** What do you tell parents about August?

**Harding:** My message is we will be open. But what that looks like we don't know. We'll be enrolling students; it might be virtual or hybrid, that remains to be seen.

**Gramm:** Will all onboarding and orientation be virtual this summer?

**Harding:** A virtual high five to Kenyon for 9<sup>th</sup> months leading to a permanent change in onboarding made last summer. Now, all around the country, colleges are scrambling to create summer onboarding for students. But because we had a year's head start, we are in better shape.

**Bonner:** Yes, summer orientation was 100% virtual last year, with a few Panther retreats for some few hundreds in-person. This summer will be entirely virtual.

**Borovetz:** Will there be a delay on the due date for decisions by prospective students?

**Harding:** No, it's still May 1.

**Gramm:** Any delay on due date for deposits?

**Harding:** No. As of this morning 30% more deposits than last year. We're being generous with requests for accommodations though.

**Borovetz:** Have we lost students because of this?

**Harding:** Remains to be seen. Right now we're running well ahead with deposits.

**Kitutu:** I can confirm that with nursing

**Harding:** We have great faculty, and that is resonating with students and family.

**Borovetz:** Did you receive the same numbers of applications this year?

**Harding:** Just a hair under 1% fewer than last year. Second highest number of applications this year.

**Kitutu:** Question for Kenyon: Students who are going to take classes in the summer. Some of them will be out-of-state students. Is there any question about letting out-of-state students pay in-state since they are getting information same way?

**Bonner:** That's up to Provost. We have not made that decision yet. Marc?

**Harding:** There is considerable discussion about it. If we make a decision, it think it will be soon.

**Taboas:** I think this was a productive meeting.

Meeting Adjourned: 1:25.