

Update on COVID-19 (29 March 2020)

Sunday, March 29, 2020 12:52 PM

Dear Members of HKUST,

COVID-19 is affecting the world at a fast-growing pace. Universities all over the world, including HKUST, have made necessary moves to adapt and adjust. In the process, meaningful partnerships and collaboration are being fostered. On March 18 HKUST hosted a [webinar](#) to share experiences in online teaching in a real-time interactive mode with participants from dozens of institutions around the world. We also thank numerous colleagues, students and alumni who are developing scientific knowledge and technologies to help meet the challenges posed by the pandemic (https://publications.ust.hk/Fight_COVID-19/).

In light of the Hong Kong SAR Government's most recent public health measures announced on March 27, Friday, the HKUST administration offers the following updates about our operations.

Working from home continues

All staff except those performing essential and time sensitive work should continue to work from home until further notice. All Directors and Heads of Department will maintain other operations online to the extent feasible.

Closure of facilities

All indoor and outdoor sports and recreational facilities including the tennis courts and playgrounds, Library, Learning Commons, Art Hall and all student amenities, all multi-purpose rooms and common rooms in halls, staff quarters and departments will be closed immediately until further notice. For common rooms in halls that are equipped with a microwave oven, refrigerator and water fountain, a maximum of four users will be allowed at the same time. While the Government's latest measures are intrusive, they are designed to minimize the public health risk from the rapid escalation of COVID-19 cases. We fully understand the inconvenience caused by such closures and restrictions, and we ask for your support and understanding.

Catering facilities and supermarket

On-campus dining and grocery facilities will be maintained. We will strictly follow the Government's guidelines on reducing capacity and social distancing. All patrons of catering facilities will be provided with hand sanitizers and their body temperature will be checked before entering. The Campus Services Office will continue to offer update of the various services.

Classes

Classes will continue with the current online real time mode for the rest of the term.

In-person gatherings

Except for work, essential or otherwise approved activities, and family groups living in the same accommodation, no gatherings on campus with more than four people are permitted.

Information on confirmed, suspected and quarantine cases

Official and updated figures on cases of HKUST members confirmed or awaiting test results, and quarantine cases managed by the University are available at: <https://hseo.ust.hk/ncov>. The University

has been closely monitoring the confirmed cases and has reached out to all members who might have had contact with them during the concerned periods to provide advice and assistance.

Access to research facilities and laboratories

Central research facilities (CRFs) and laboratories will continue to be accessible, but on a restricted basis with specific guidelines, to support critical and essential needs. For UGs, make-up laboratory work will be arranged later to support students' graduation on time. If there are extenuating needs with proper justification, exceptions will be granted to access labs, subject to approval by the Department/Division Heads (DHs), with advanced alert to the responsible Dean/Director of Interdisciplinary Programs Office. For RPs approval will be granted by the faculty supervisors, and for TPs approval will be granted by program directors, both in coordination with DHs. The Health, Safety and Environment Office (HSEO) will exercise oversight of all facilities.

Support for substantiation-track faculty and faculty recruitment

Considering the possible slowdown of scholarly activities caused by the special teaching and research arrangements, non-substantiated faculty members who so far have not submitted their cases for substantiation review are offered an option of extending their tenure clock by one year. While some overseas universities have recently suspended faculty hiring, HKUST continues to actively recruit faculty. We urge our academic units to be proactive and engaged in identifying and attracting talents to join us.

Staff support

To support our colleagues, the Staff Counselling Service is directly accessible via a phone hotline: 2755 9227. We will continue to distribute essential supplies such as masks to all members as appropriate. We have also distributed additional masks and sanitizing liquids to those frontline colleagues with environmentally challenging responsibilities.

Students' counseling and career advice

One-on-one counseling is available through flexible means and platforms (including online), based on need. Appointments can be made by calling 2358 6696 or sending an e-mail to counsel@ust.hk. A variety of workshops themed, "Connect with Your Heart - Find the Inner Peace," are provided (see [webpage](#)) including [Self-Help Library](#). A 24/7 Helpline for students continues to be in operation (8208 2688).

Some of our graduating students may be concerned about suitable employment opportunities, our Departments and Schools/Interdisciplinary Programs Office can assist. The Career Center has moved its operations and services online (<https://career.ust.hk/web/home.php>), including postings of jobs, and recruitment talks and career development programs via Zoom or webinars. In addition, students can seek help from Career Advisors as well.

Preparation and adjustment for admission of new students

Given that the fight against COVID-19 may affect the various exams and certification of credentials, the University is making plans for various scenarios to adapt our admissions procedures accordingly. We are also adjusting application deadlines and processes to help qualified students whose original plans of attending overseas universities may now be uncertain or changed.

While the situation in and outside Hong Kong is unpredictable, we would like to reassure all members that your health and safety is of the highest priority. If you have questions or urgent needs, please

contact the various responsible offices listed above, or your Department/Division/supervisor for assistance.

We are experiencing the pandemic together—regardless of territorial boundaries, social status, profession and other personal background. We will continue to do our best as a community by being mutually supportive, considerate, and staying alert. This is also the obligation we should fulfill to protect each other, especially the medical staff who are tirelessly trying to save the lives of those suffering from the coronavirus.

Please take care and stay healthy.

Wei Shyy, President

Lionel Ni, Provost

Mark Hodgson, Vice-President for Administration and Business

Nancy Ip, Vice-President for Research and Development