



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES

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Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs

17 March 2020

Memorandum No. OVPAA 2020-39

For: UP System Faculty and Students

(through the Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors for Academic Affairs, the Deans, Institute Directors and Department Chairs)

From: Maria Cynthia Rose Banzon Bautista
Vice-President for Academic Affairs

**Re: ADDENDUM TO MEMORANDUM NO. OVPAA 2020-38 ON THE
SUSPENSION OF CLASSES IN ALL UP CONSTITUENT
UNIVERSITIES EXCEPT UP OPEN UNIVERSITY**

After issuing Memorandum No. 2020-38 this morning, we were asked why the System is suspending online classes and technology-supported learning activities in the residential CUs throughout the lockdown when faculty and students have begun to adjust to these modes of delivery. Even assuming that as instructed, faculty members were able to organize their classes for peer learning such that students without gadgets for online access and/or have weak/limited/no internet connections are matched with those with access, asking students without access to commute from their homes to work on assignments or attend online classes in another classmate's house renders them more vulnerable to the spread of the virus. Moreover, the directive of health authorities to stay home and the lack of transportation during the lockdown make such peer learning arrangements untenable.

But apart from the issue of student access to technology, the UP System deemed it necessary to suspend online classes and alternative learning activities because of the high level of anxiety among students, faculty and staff in light of this unprecedented health emergency. The expanded community quarantine further brought basic survival needs to the fore of everyone's consciousness, temporarily making academic concerns secondary—at least in its initial implementation.

By way of a background, the premise of previous OVPAA Memoranda on class suspensions in the time of COVID-19 (Memorandum No. 2020-31, Memorandum No. 2020-35) is the responsibility of the University of the Philippines to provide learning opportunities in the midst of the disruption wrought by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. To facilitate learning, the UP System called for a shift to blended learning and enjoined faculty members to review and revise their syllabi as necessary for the second half of the semester, utilizing alternative modes of delivery—from “low-tech” options (e.g. Q&A via SMS, printed worksheets) to online activities (e.g. blogs, online quizzes, discussion fora, webinars)—and assessments. The faculty was also instructed to combine the use of learning management systems and tools for technology-supported synchronous class meetings with the caveat that every faculty member ought to know who among their students have no gadgets for online access and/or have weak/limited/no internet access.

To lay the infrastructure for these strategies for sustaining learning, the UP System quickly procured an institutional subscription to ZOOM in the hope of holding virtual classes and webinars as well as meetings of department and institute faculty that iteratively enable its members to assess the situation and adjust program requirements accordingly. As of this afternoon, Zoom has been available to System faculty, REPs and students using the up.edu.ph domain. Exploratory talks with TELCOS to provide affordable data packages with reliable and speedy internet connections, which would include access to zoom and learning management systems, is also ongoing.

Even prior to the University’s institutional subscription to ZOOM, faculty members have begun conducting online classes via this platform in combination with UP’s and other learning management systems. The feedback has been positive. However, students have formally raised the very real issue of differential access to gadgets and internet. Preliminary estimates in one of the big CUs suggest that about 40% of students do not have such access. But just as faculty and university officials were devising feasible solutions to the problem (e.g. lending the tablets used in University meetings), the lockdown of Metro Manila and now of Luzon and provinces outside Luzon—e.g. Cebu, Bohol, Panay, Leyte—fell upon us. This situation is what actually compelled us to step back from insisting that throughout the lockdown, online classes and alternative class activities must go on and follow the timetable of the class syllabi the faculty was originally directed to have revised this week.

Against this backdrop, OVPAA Memorandum 2020-38 articulated the University’s expectation of its faculty under a Work-from-Home regime. On the other hand, this Memorandum states what UP expects of its students once they adjust in the next few days to the latest government directive.

Two provisions of Resolution 11 in President Duterte’s earlier declaration of Code Red qualified class suspensions with “provided all students shall fulfill all their academic requirements during the period of suspension”. Although it did not specify how this directive is to be enforced, the UP System construed class suspension as discontinuance of physical classroom activities but not of alternative learning activities. Hence, the System continued to require the combined use of learning management systems and synchronous online classes.

While the lockdown forced us to suspend these activities, the UP System contends that academic requirements must be met or that learning continues, however imperfect the learning conditions. It is in this spirit that students are expected to attend to the readings and assignments given them before the lockdown. What is suspended is not learning *per*

se but additional activities and submissions of output following the deadlines set in the original class syllabus or immediately before the lockdown. Moreover, because they are UP students and will be among the country's future leaders in different branches of knowledge, they are expected to feed their intellectual curiosity and independently deepen their understanding of the topics they have covered so far. They are also expected to learn what they can about the topics they are supposed to have been covering during the suspension—within the limits of course of their personal circumstances and access to material. When classes resume in mid-April, they will be in a better position to engage with their teachers and classmates. By then, some workable solutions to the issue of unequal access to technology would have been devised since we project that technology-supported learning will be the way to go throughout several months of the COVID-19 crisis and even when the situation normalizes thereafter.

For units informally requesting to resume their online classes and alternative learning activities earlier than 14 April 2020 for various reasons—including timing the graduation for this year's professional licensure examinations—the Department Chairs, Institute Directors or College Deans of such units will be required to address their request for exemption from the period of class suspension to UP President Danilo L. Concepcion through the CU Chancellor with the attached revised syllabus and plan of action to ensure compliance with the terms of the lockdown.

Thank you for your consideration and understanding. Rest assured that the University's **ITERATIVE** response to unfolding developments will be based on collective assessments of the situation throughout this crisis.

Take care and stay safe.