



BROOKLYN FRIENDS SCHOOL

3 April 2020

Dear Upper School Families and Students,

I write this evening to touch base at the end of our first week of Virtual Upper School (VUS) at BFS. I must begin by outstretching my heart—somehow through the cyber community—to all of you. I know that some of you are scared, some are ill, some are growing closer to family and friends and renewing relationships you thought had been lost forever, and all of you are doing your best to adjust to circumstances that none of us imagined beyond science fiction novels we read as children or might even be reading today.

Despite this, it was wonderful on Monday to see all of our students, teachers, and Crissy in our remote Collections to launch VUS after an extended advisory for students and their advisors. Last night, I experienced another joy as I listened and participated in the Junior/Senior Family-Student College Counseling Q&A. Not only was it heartwarming to see each other, but it was also good to be able to have our college counselors, Terry and Tiffany, share that despite our dire times, colleges and universities are stepping up with great compassion and understanding, feeling compelled to look at the whole child in applications, and universally supporting BFS in its move to put students wellbeing first by ending our spring 2020 semester with pass/fail grades.

BFS is proving to be a leader nationally in independent schools during this time. We are demonstrating active ways to engage students remotely; we are formally evaluating the remote learning environment to scale back or up as we move forward, and we are supporting not just a notion of Quaker values but demonstrating sound Quaker beliefs. We continue to hold strong the individuality of the spirit, the need to put students first, and the understanding that to be a Quaker school at this time requires us to be forthright in demonstrating a compassionate and respectful spirit that honors that our teachers and you need to put your masks on first in order to take care of self, family, and ultimately our children.

It is essential that each one of us—we leaders, we parents, we students, we teachers, we colleagues—must at every moment of communication in writing and on video calls remind ourselves of this significant fact: teachers are teaching in a living room while their partner works remotely in the kitchen and their own toddlers tug on one leg while a 4th grader tugs on the other to demand attention as they learn remotely; students and families are ill and cannot participate in the life of school, albeit remotely, and school may have been the one place they felt connected. We are all suffering deaths and the profundity of loss; the loss of who we thought we were and what we thought we were capable of, what intellectual knowledge or understanding or experience we thought we would be able to impart or share today; what gifts we thought tomorrow might bring; the excitement and anticipation of culminating events like birthdays, weddings, parties, weekly religious gatherings, dinners out; the joy of choice and freedom of movement. No one thought so much would have to be contained spiritually, emotionally, and physically—and never did we think we would have to do so in the blink of an eye, the droplet of a virus.

I ask that every time we reach out to share an inquiry or concern, we first ask of and respond to ourselves, *Am I being considerate of the times? Have I reviewed all materials shared with me? Am I fully cognizant and am I acknowledging to myself that I know and believe that everyone involved with me, my family, and my child is doing everything they can? Am I coming from a heart-place and with a profound understanding that the educators with whom I share the responsibility for my child are actively and daily navigating life, death, fear, new learning, and the teaching of the students they have always considered to be like their own children?*

It is first the pause, the recognition of the breath, and then the answering of these questions that will hold this community together, and this will help to fuel us to move ahead with great respect, dignity, integrity, and abounding strength. With this in mind, I ask you to review the FAQs below, and I pronounce that although this world will be different, and so will we, after this pandemic subsides, what we will have intact, what we must keep connected, with all its intricate folds, is our common humanity.

With compassion and fear; with a great belief and knowledge only of the present before me; with love,

Lisa Arrastia
Head of Upper School

FAQs

What Is the US Emergency Remote Learning Team and Who Is a Part of the Team?

The US ERLT is the group that worked before the school closed on 9 March and every day of spring break to ensure that teachers, students, and families were supported and informed about Virtual Upper School. The group has been meeting sometimes daily and now bi-weekly; planning; using input from colleagues; regional, national, and global independent and public schools; BFS families, students, and the all-school BFS COVID-19 Emergency Response team. We share information, brainstorm, shift according to student and teacher needs and then promptly execute.

We are: Lisa (Head of US), *Pete*, (Interim Asst Head of US), *Angie* (G9/10 Dean), *Kristin* (G11/12 Dean), *Kamauru* (US Psychologist).

Each of us serves as what we call a Virtual Point Person *solely for US subject departments and teachers* to streamline communication amongst our colleagues as follows

Lisa

All Upper School and all-school leadership teams.

Kamauru

Learning support and community engagement (i.e., how to bring us together remotely to sustain community) and dedicated, remote social-emotional support for students.

Pete

World Languages and the arts.

Kristin
Humanities (history and English).

Angie
Math and science.

Does the US Have an Educational Technology Integrator?

Yes. They are Tristan Angieri.

Do You Have a US Hub to Centralize Resources and Communications Amongst Teachers?

Yes. See a screenshot of just a portion of our Virtual Upper School Hub **attached**.

What About Students? Is There an Online Site for Students and Teachers to Remotely Exchange and Share?

Yes. See a screenshot of just a portion of our “2nd Floor Commons” **attached**.

Will Parent-Teacher Conferences Still Be Held on 23 and 24 April?

Yes. The US is still holding its conferences in late April because our seniors will have completed their coursework by 1 May. On 1 April, our US administrative assistant, Kristina Garrity, sent families a letter regarding conferences. The only change to this communication is that *your conference will now be held with your child’s advisor*. Your child’s advisor will share with you an academic update as well as discuss with you your child’s social-emotional wellbeing. Look out for more information on conferences soon.

Will the US ERLT Evaluate Virtual Upper School?

Yes. The first *teacher* survey went out today, 3 April, through which we will check on the wellbeing and educational needs and experiences of teachers. We will do the same with students and families soon after. As I stated in my [26 March communication](#) to families and students, we will look to see what shifts should be made to teaching and learning (e.g., screen time, ergonomics, content, pedagogy, methodologies,) after two weeks of remote teaching/learning. We have already learned much and have made some shifts accordingly.

Are you in Communication with Other Independent Schools About What They’re Doing?

Yes. Weekly, I have been in communication by email and Zoom with 25 upper school division heads, division heads and heads across the nation, and over 20 division heads at international schools including in Italy and Asia. Crissy is in daily communication with hundreds of Heads across the nation. What we have learned is that BFS is an innovative leader during this time of remote teaching, learning, and school leadership while also a strong and effective partner with the independent school network to align our approaches in the still-developing best practices for remote education.

Is the School Still Engaged in Hiring Even Though We Are Virtual?

Yes. The hiring process continues. As stated in my 19 February communication to all of you:

As is best practice at all independent schools, this spring the school will share with families a comprehensive list of everyone in our colleague body who will not return in September. In the fall, we will send a letter to families welcoming all new colleagues to our community.

What About Quakerism Class and Meeting For Worship (MFW)?

Before school closed on 9 March, Angie Adams and Kristin O'Connor, our deans, taught Quakerism for grade 9. Both deans come from a long tradition of Quaker education. Kristin was a teacher and math chair at [Germantown Friends School](#) in Philadelphia and Angie is a lifetime friend of [Abington Friends School](#) (AFS), also in Philadelphia. Angie was also a math teacher and the Dean of Students at AFS.

Now that we are in an extended school closure at least until 20 April, we have considered ensuring we maintain our Quaker values while recognizing that the in-person norm to which Quaker schools are accustomed must be adjusted given the pandemic. We have incorporated a *Quaker Life Enrichment* period on Wednesdays that will be guided by the deans. During this time we will move between various elements of Quakerism, e.g., queries, Meeting for Business, MFW, etc.

Will We Have a Prom?

We are following the guidelines of the CDC and the restrictions put in place by the Mayor of NYC, the Governor of NYS, and the Federal Government. We do not yet know whether prom will be held live, but we are committed to celebrating our seniors in creative ways. More information is to come about our end-of-year traditions.

Will There Be a Commencement?

What we know right now is that seniors will receive a diploma. Today, Kristina reached out to families to ensure that we have the correct name for your diploma. If you do not provide us the correct name on the form shared in the 3 April communication [here](#) (the form link is in the letter), we will use the student name listed in MyBackPack. We are following the guidelines of the CDC and the restrictions put in place by the Mayor of NYC, the Governor of NYS, and the Federal Government. We do not yet know whether Commencement will be held live. If it is not, we *will* plan ways to celebrate you/seniors!

Will We Still Have a Yearbook?

The making of the Yearbook is on time. In a future communication, we will share whether Yearbooks may be picked up, mailed, or shared at another time. Either way, the US will have a Yearbook.

Are Seniors Still Done with School on 1 May?

Yes.

What's the Update on the IB

Adjustments will be made, but we are still bound to the requirements of the IBO, which have adjusted slightly.

- All IB schools are affected by the global pandemic.
- The May exam is canceled.

- BFS classes for seniors will end on 1 May.
- The extension for IB coursework (e.g., IAs) was extended by the IBO to 20 May. On 27 March, the IB shortened this extension to 20 April, which means all coursework must be completed and uploaded to the IBO by 17 April.
- G12 IB SPANISH ORAL ASSESSMENTS
 - On April 7 and 8, our Spanish teachers will conduct the Internal Assessment portion of their course. This requires approximately 40 minutes of time with each of their students.
 - To facilitate this process, some students will miss one (1) class period on 7 April.
 - No student will miss IB Physics, IB Biology, IB Music, or IB Theatre.
 - All other Spanish classes on April 7th are canceled.
- Regarding Dan Ajerman's classes, the department is working to meet the IB's changed and shorter date for 12th-grade submissions of coursework. We are trying very hard to honor the fact that several students, teachers, and families report that additional screen time to make up any missed work would not be healthy at this time, especially when everyone is trying to adjust to a devastating change in their lives. Right now, the students lack a lab and other science materials. This is the same in all of our subjects whereby students are missing materials and there is a backorder on materials. We are trying to compel the IB to be more accommodating not just for our students but for its hundreds of thousands of students globally in the Class of 2021. Almost all IB schools are voicing their concerns to the IBO.

Student VUS Expectations

Please see my [26 March letter to students and families](#), which lists the expectations. Additionally, ***all parents/legal guardians and students are required to sign the Student/Family VUS Commitments here.*** The Commitments were shared in advisory this past week.

Who Was Consulted About Moving Spring 2020 Semester Grades to Pass/Fail?

- BFS Office of College Counseling
- BFS Covid-19 Emergency Response Team
 - Members are: Head of School, Assistant Head of School, the five division heads, Director of Communications, Director of Advancement, Director of Athletics, Director of Technology, Health Services, Counseling
- University of Chicago Lab Schools (moved to P/F based on approval by University of Chicago admissions)
- Francis W. Parker School Dept of College Counseling
- The Keys School
- 24 Upper School Division Heads in NYC
- Review of college notices announcing the acceptance of P/F or Credit/No Credit by colleges and universities like Amherst, Yale, University of Chicago, MIT (the latter

college will not accept the SAT/ACT for fall 2020 applicants and other colleges are following suit)

Is There Still College Counseling?

Yes. Junior Seminar continues, and regular appointments continue. Listen to the recording linked below to learn more about how our college counseling is as robust as ever and even more so now that colleges are still working to understand how the virus will affect tours, admissions, and more.

I Missed the 2 April Q&A with College Counseling, Can You Update Me?

Yes.

- Click [here](#) for a link to a *recording* of the 2 April Q&A.
- Click [here](#) for a *written* message from our director of college counseling, Terry Kung.
- So much on the college front is changing daily due to the virus. For this reason, an additional update for junior and senior students and families will be shared by Terry very soon.

Will the Learning Center Still Provide Learning Support

Yes. Those students who require individual meetings have support in their schedules and/or regular appointments, and the Learning Center is open. Additionally, our learning specialists have access to all VUS Google Classrooms.

I have Other Questions that Were Not Addressed Here?

- Contact your child's *advisor* for direct communications about your child.
- Contact your child's *teacher* for direct information about their class.
- Contact your *grade-level dean* ([Angie](#) | G9-10 and [Kristin](#) | G11-12) for a broad discussion about your child.
- Contact [Lisa](#) for more broad-based questions and concerns about VUS.
- Contact [Pete](#) about the IB, academic, or schedule needs.
- Contact [Kamauru](#) for social-emotional concerns.
- Contact [Kristina](#) for absences or other administrative details like scheduling remote time with *Lisa* or *Pete*.
- Trouble with links in this communication? Please contact usaa@brooklynfriends.org.

Want to Appreciate VUS Colleagues?

- Thus far, the US has already held one remote mid-week celebration via Zoom and shared other small tokens of appreciation.
- There are plenty of ways to share your collective appreciation with our colleague community. Talk to your US Class Parent Reps, [Lisa Stephenson](#) and [Pascale Setbon](#).