

**From:** Krishna Rajagopal & Ian A. Waitz iaw@mit.edu  
**Subject:** FYI: Welcome to Remote Learning Student Letters  
**Date:** March 26, 2020 at 5:29 PM  
**To:** <8am\_covid@mit.edu> 8am\_covid@mit.edu



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## Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Dear Colleagues,

We wanted to share with you the notes that were sent to undergraduate and graduate students earlier this afternoon. The aim was to welcome them to remote learning at MIT, as classes resume on March 30.

Thanks.

Krishna & Ian

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Dear Undergraduates,

Welcome back to a different kind of MIT.

We would have loved to welcome you back in-person and on-campus but, with the advent of Covid-19, the welcome we are providing is to a new mode of learning. This new mode of learning is not one that any of us anticipated.

The important thing is that we are, wherever we might be in the world, still together. Still part of a vibrant community. Still committed to our values and principles. Still quirky and creative. Teaching and learning is what we do, together. And, that is what we will be doing starting on Monday even though we are now together remotely.

Remote learning does require us to be flexible and patient, to compromise, and to have an infinite supply of good humor and humility. Our number one piece of advice is rather simple: Be forgiving of yourself and others. At the same time, let's make this as fantastic of a learning experience as we can.

In the past few weeks, our faculty, instructors, TAs, and academic staff have worked tirelessly to bring 1200+ courses to virtual life. If you want to see a briefing for faculty on how they should prepare, [watch this short video](#).

As we told the faculty, our focus is on learning goals, with the vital caveat that not all of our standard goals can (or even should be attempted to) be achieved in this new mode.

**Some Things to Keep in Mind**

### **Some Things to Keep in Mind**

Here are some things to keep in mind, whether you are taking a class or teaching one:

- Labs, project-based learning, and hands-on activities all pose challenges. Finding new ways to achieve some of the learning goals that we normally achieve in these ways will engage your creativity, as well as that of your instructors.
- Some of what we offer you will be asynchronous, with each of you choosing your own time for it just as you do with problem sets on campus. Now this will also include videotaped material. Some of your classes will be synchronous, typically live Zoom sessions.
- Since most of your instructors will be teaching from home, when you join them for your live Zoom lecture or seminar or discussion they will be welcoming you into their homes and you will be entering into their daily lives. Don't be surprised if you encounter a kid or two in the background, spouses and partners might pop in and out of view, as may pets, and everything will not always go according to plan.

Reflecting on the past two weeks here, we hope it doesn't surprise you that preparing for remote learning is less about technology and is more about capturing the wonderfully complex ecosystem of MIT's creative educators across our unique departments. We have also been reflecting on how your learning transcends what we teach you, via all the things you do, all the ways you interact in the physical spaces of our campus, all the conversations and setting and "accidental" meetings, and all the boba tea.

### **Your Student Success Team**

With all this in mind (OK, not the boba tea) we are also introducing coaches into the mix. You will hear more soon, but in addition to connecting to MIT through instructors and an academic advisor as you always do you will each have a coach from MIT's newly created Student Success Team. Your coach will meet with you one-on-one every week, keep you connected to the Infinite, and help you to find new ways for your remote learning to transcend our remote teaching.

This will include not only checking in about your learning in classes, but connecting you with virtual resources for career services and professional development, experiential learning, IS&T, support services, and generally anything that will be helpful. Your coach might be a librarian, or a devoted staff member from one of the many student-facing offices at MIT or from a department, or for that matter an athletic coach! They will be there for you, to help you find answers, to connect you to each other and to MIT resources, and to provide a birds eye view of our virtual campus.

### **Remote Learning Resources**

In addition, we have created a new remote learning resources website for students (<http://learnremote.mit.edu>). For example, we know from past studies, that one of the most challenging parts of remote learning is scheduling and time management. The ebb and flow of the campus will be missing and silent, and that can be strange and disorienting.

Thus, managing your time will be essential because each of your classes will have their own mix of elements and each instructional team will bring a different set of plans and expectations. That's as it should be. You will face a combination of the asynchronous and synchronous content and lectures. You will be contacted by instructors at different times

... synchronous content and research. You will be contacted by instructors at different times and sometimes in different modalities. Each of you will have to manage unique constraints, depending on where you live, who you live with, and your own comfort with virtual teams.

### **Learning Together**

We expect the move to remote teaching will be educational in a different sense, as it is, by necessity, more personal and raw than in a 250 seat classroom. Yes, this will be hard, but a different kind of hard. You might be disappointed in missing out on a lab section, on using a particular tool, or even your favorite study space. But, at the same time, you and we may learn more than ever before.

We all need to set different, not lesser, expectations as we build our virtual learning community together.

In closing, we expect that we will find ways in which this is an unprecedented opportunity. We all are honest enough, though, to admit this is not a situation we would choose. We miss all of you. This is the best we have right now ... so let's make the best of it.

Sincerely,

Krishna and Ian

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Krishna Rajagopal  
Dean for Digital Learning  
William A. M. Burden Professor of Physics

Ian A. Waitz  
Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate and Graduate Education  
Jerome C. Hunsaker Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics

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Dear Graduate Students,

Welcome back to a different kind of MIT.

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The important thing is that we are, wherever we might be in the world, still together. Still part of a vibrant community. Still committed to our values and principles. Still quirky and creative. Teaching and learning is what we do, together. And, that is what we will be doing starting on Monday even though we are now together remotely.

Remote learning does require us to be flexible and patient, to compromise, and to have an infinite supply of good humor and humility. Our number one piece of advice is rather simple: Be forgiving of yourself and others. At the same time, let's make this as fantastic of a learning experience as we can.

In the past few weeks, our faculty, instructors, TAs (including many of you), and academic staff have worked tirelessly to bring 1200+ courses to virtual life. If you want to see a briefing for faculty on how they should prepare, [watch this short video](#).

As we told the faculty, our focus is on learning goals, with the vital caveat that not all of our standard goals can (or even should be attempted to) be achieved in this new mode.

### **Some Things to Keep in Mind**

Here are some things to keep in mind, whether you are taking a class or teaching one:

- Labs, project-based learning, and hands-on activities all pose challenges. Finding new ways to achieve some of the learning goals that we normally achieve in these ways will engage your creativity, as well as that of your instructors.
- Some of what is offered will be asynchronous, with students choosing their own time for engaging. Now this will also include videotaped material. Other classes will be synchronous, typically live Zoom sessions.
- Since most of your instructors (and some of you) will be teaching from home, live Zoom lectures or seminars or discussions will take place there. Don't be surprised if you encounter (or you yourself have to manage) a kid or two in the background, spouses and partners popping in and out of view. Everything will not always go according to plan.

Reflecting on the past two weeks here, we hope it doesn't surprise you that preparing for remote learning is less about technology and more about how wonderfully complex the ecosystem of MIT is with creative educators across our unique departments. We have also been reflecting on how your learning transcends what we teach you, via all the things you do, all the ways you interact in the physical spaces of our campus, all the conversations and "accidental" meetings, and all the boba tea.

### **Learning & Teaching Resources**

With all this in mind (OK, not the boba tea) we are also introducing coaches into the mix. You will hear more soon, but in addition to connecting to MIT through instructors and an advisor as you always do, you will each have a coach from MIT's newly created Student Success Team. We realize that as graduate students you might already have such networks already in place, so this is opt-in.

In addition, we have created a new remote learning resources website directed specifically toward students (<http://learnremote.mit.edu>). For example, we know from past studies, that one of the most challenging parts of remote learning is scheduling and time management. The ebb and flow of the campus will be missing and silent, and that can be strange and disorienting.

We would also encourage those of you who are supporting teaching to dive into (<http://teachremote.mit.edu>) for resources, tools, and support for teaching remotely at MIT.

### **Working Together**

We expect the move to remote teaching will be educational in a different sense, as it is, by necessity, more personal and raw than in a 250 seat classroom. Yes, this will be hard, but a different kind of hard. You might be disappointed in missing out on a lab section, on

using a particular tool, or even your favorite study space. But, at the same time, you and we may learn more than ever before.

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