



CATE SCHOOL
commitment | companionship | scholarship | service

March 18, 2020

Dear Cate Families,

I have gotten a host of notes of late from organizations, entities, or individuals talking about their “plans.” It is an optimistic thing to do at this particular time to make commitments, at least if we want to be able to stick to them. Other forces beyond us seem to compel us to adjust rather than plan. We have to actually do both: set some foundational expectations and then do everything we can to live up to them, even if that means that plans or timetables change. The intention remains, perpetually.

That is the premise of much of the work we are doing on the Mesa this week, planning for a new form of program delivery and trying to contain within it the very priorities and character that distinguish our on-campus program. It is by certain measures impossible. We cannot replicate the experience on this campus in the digital realm. But that is not our principal intention.

Program Design and Intention

The program we will deliver is being designed to maintain the connectivity of this community, to offer an opportunity to energize our minds and explore remarkable and intriguing course content, and to press forward not simply with our scholarship but with our understanding of value in this world.

Our distance from each other is conspicuous right now. Our program will help to bridge those gaps. As we have noted in previous communications, we are breaking up our trimester into chapters. The first begins on Monday and will continue for two weeks. It is essentially a ramping up of our online program, building competence and momentum among both students and faculty in a program delivery system that is new to all.

Program Delivery and Schedule

Already we have developed a clear foundational structure for delivery, much of it built on systems and principles with which students are already familiar. We will continue to use Haiku, our learning management system, and Veracross, which handles our registrar and scheduling functions. We will also have redundant technologies in the event volume of use slows or overwhelms first choice delivery systems.

We will maintain our “N” week schedule for synchronous classes (classes where the instructor and the students will be together online and interacting with each other). Most classes in the first chapter

of this rollout will meet once per week in a synchronous format. That means the other two classes per week will be administered in a different digital manner and can be undertaken on a student's preferred schedule.

Faculty availability will remain consistent and dependable throughout the day and early evening. We are expecting lots of one-on-one interaction and have structured our programming accordingly. We are also mindful that our students are in a great many time zones, and we will record and archive all synchronous classes in the event that any student is unable to be present when the class meets.

As our research and outreach confirms, there is a limit to how much time young people should spend in front of a screen on any given day. We have broken down our work, therefore, so that over the course of a week, students in the lower school will spend no more than 4.5 hours on any given class. That includes time spent in "class" as well as independent work and homework time. The expectation in the upper school is 5.5 hours per week per class. For perspective, the amount of time spent in class and on homework in a regular week on site at Cate for an upper school student is between 6.5 and 7.5 hours, depending upon course load.

Synchronous classes in this new format to maximize attention spans and minimize fatigue will be no more than 45 minutes long – rather than the 65 minutes we offer here. That will also ensure that all students will have a break between classes in the event they have two synchronous classes in succeeding periods on the same day.

Important Resources and Setup

We have prepared instructional videos designed to get students up to speed on our platforms for synchronous classes: [Google Meet](#) and [Zoom](#). Advisors have already begun reaching out as well to ensure that students have appropriate technological resources and are ready to use the technology they need. We would like all students to complete [this brief survey](#) (student login required) that assesses their readiness.

We are building templates for assignments, basic guidelines for how students should approach this new educational medium, online class etiquette instructions and the like, all of which will be delivered in a subsequent mailing this week. Though we have made significant progress already on this transition to online instruction we are expecting our delivery techniques to evolve in response to student need. We plan to gather feedback after our first week and likely at subsequent intervals thereafter.

Return Date

Though we established Sunday, April 5, as our intended return date a week ago, the momentum of the pandemic has made that highly unlikely. We are talking internally about extending our online programming until the end of April in the hope that all can return to the Mesa for the last month of school. It never hurts to have goals, and ours remains to finish the school year as we began it: together.

Other News

I must share one other bit of news as well with respect to staffing. Da'Jon James, who has led our

vocal music program this year, is no longer working at Cate. We have been communicating with his advisees to get them comfortably situated with another advisor. Chorale, Camerata, and Last Call, the ensembles with whom Mr. James was working, will be on hiatus during this period of remote learning, much like our instrumentalists and stage performers, though we continue to examine ways to bring such vital performance opportunities to our students virtually.

You should know, as well, that we are building the means to enable community events - not simply advisories but assemblies, Servons speeches, even dorm meetings. Look for more on that in subsequent mailings.

In the meantime, stay well. All of us on the Mesa look forward to connecting with you virtually very soon.

Servons,

Ben



<https://www.cate.org>

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