

Boston University Office of the President

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Dear Friends,

I have written earlier today to our graduating seniors and also those graduating from master's and doctoral programs to announce that we will be postponing our May 15–17 Commencement events and developing plans to hold in-person exercises in either late August or early fall. As you would guess, this was a decision we made reluctantly and with more than a little regret. Understandably, our students look forward to the Commencement Weekend as the welcome celebration of their years of hard work and achievement, to be shared with their families and colleagues and with our faculty and staff.

The many exigencies entailed by the spread of COVID-19 made it increasingly clear that it would be imprudent to host a large gathering, such as Commencement, only seven weeks from now. We have a group that is already working hard to develop options for a postponed Commencement, one we fully intend to be worthy of our students' achievements. And I have promised to let our students know by May 1 what our plans are.

Our students have been resilient and adaptive this month as we have made the transition to remote teaching and learning and informed them of the necessity to leave campus. In the many emails I have seen from students (and those which other administrative colleagues have received), the most consistent theme was the importance of an in-person (as opposed to virtual) Commencement. As in all things, there are trade-offs, but we believe developing a plan for a postponed but live Commencement is the better option.

We also realize that our decision to postpone the event will make it impossible for some graduates and their families to attend on the new date. This is an inevitable consequence of the impact of COVID-19. Individual schools and colleges may plan virtual events in May to celebrate students' accomplishments, especially for those graduating from professional graduate programs for whom returning to campus later this year may be impossible.

We are planning to mail diplomas to all graduates as soon as practical, because we know that many will need these documents to secure licenses and employment. We will share further details about this process as soon as they are available.

I am grateful to faculty and staff who have worked tirelessly for weeks to implement remote teaching and learning and to help students relocate home or elsewhere (as needed)—and will, I have no doubt, do what's required to ensure our graduates are properly celebrated. The COVID-19 epidemic has required that I make the most difficult decisions of my academic career. It is disconcerting to walk a campus that should be vibrant with students and active teaching and research, but which has been rendered a ghost town. But when the students do return—as they will—I believe we will appreciate the buzz and vitality of campus life all the more.

Please stay safe and well,

Sincerely,

Robert A. Brown
President