

Those present:

- John White, BME Department Chair
- Mary Dunlop, BME Grad Chair
- Christen Bailey, BME Assistant Director of Academic Programs
- Sanaya Shroff, on behalf of GWISE
- Reps on behalf of BME Graduate Student Committee
- BME Graduate Student TFs

John Intro:

- BU's reopening plan started with Bob Brown
- No other university is doing something quite like it
- There is already a new testing center on CILSE 4th floor, will perform 5000 tests/day
  - Answer back in 24 hrs
  - Self swab
  - Undergrads will be tested twice a week
  - Grad students will probably be tested once a week
  - But, people that never show up will not be tested (requires compliance)
- Ground floor of CILSE will be used to test asymptomatic people
- University has not done a good job telling people what's going on very effectively (GWISE note: the admins have admitted this many times and promise to do better)
- Currently there is another large outbreak in the southern US → this pandemic is harder to keep in control than we thought
  - We (US) have no borders → flow of people is going to start next week throughout month of August as undergrads show up
- Some decisions are outside of John's control
- John and Ken Lutchen are in charge of engineering/BME
- Frequent testing is an advantage of BU's plan
- What BU is interested in is having the university around in two years
  - The university must be financially secure
  - But it is not just about money
- State of Mass, city of Boston, and BU will know if there's an outbreak very quickly due to comprehensiveness of testing
  - State and city will be very aware of BU's numbers and will shut things down if outbreak becomes too severe
  - Plan is to approx. double number of tests per day in Mass

## **Q&A Session**

GWISE Questions:

Q: Does BU expect TFs/RFs and/or faculty to sign COVID-19 liability waivers at any time during the course of the semester?

- John does not know, not aware that this will be the case

Q: Are there maximum deferral durations for international students that are unable to return to campus? It is suggested in the FAQs that deferring until Jan 2021 is possible. Is deferring a year possible?

- There have been conflicting reports regarding international students
- Biggest constraint is US government
  - Making it hard on international students
  - Much harder to get student visa than it was previously
- If student is overseas and trying to get a visa, consulates may not be open
- Students who are new, until they get in, we cannot pay them.
  - Legal situation is complex
- How many international students are outside the US in BME? (Returning: 2 students, incoming students: 2 students)
- Christen: Been attending ISSO workshops → no deadline to arrive on campus, but they must be on campus to receive stipend (collab between PIs and financial managers to set students up on payroll)
- Mary: When things first shut down, it was ok to pay international students (60 - 90 days), that has now expired
- Thankfully for our department, it is not large a problem in our department, but obviously it is a huge problem for the students who are affected. We are working with students closely, doing everything we can
- Paying international students can't easily be done on grants -- federal agencies check this very carefully
- International students can take classes remotely (tuition is covered), you just can't get your stipend.
- Mary: BU does have staff paid internationally (e.g. study abroad program) but quite complicated, because has to be set up on an individual country basis
- **Sanaya will share** resources on what neighboring universities are doing to pay their international students

Q: What guidelines will be provided to incoming students to effectively find a research advisor during social distancing?

- Mary: Timeline changed for rotation (rotations start earlier Sept-Nov, Nov-Feb, Feb-April). Build flexibility into the system (if lab shuts down or students come in later), this new timeline is recommended not required. Students can deviate from this
- New faculty starting in Jan will also have different rotation schedules
- Polled faculty and affiliated faculty, "Do you anticipate having funded spots in your group?"
  - First years got list of faculty who will be looking for students, can sort by research area

- Many labs have spots and are looking for students, it is not the case that labs are not hiring students
- This data will hopefully help students find appropriate labs and give them knowledge about which labs have capacity to take them
- GSC will be emailing all grad student mentors this info so they can share with their mentees

Q: Will the TF continue to be paid if they become sick? And if they are sick for most of the semester?

- John: Yes absolutely

Q: What if contact tracing identifies a TF as the source/hub of COVID-19 transmission? Will BU financially (and in other ways) protect that TF?

- If a graduate student is identified as a hub, you are indemnified (you suffer no legal consequences). Students need to be smart about safety, too
- General rules of indemnification are if it's all accidental, they would sue university not particular TF
- Only exception is if you are doing something illegal, then whatever you're doing against the law you can be held accountable for

Q: Where can graduate students report misuse of facilities (occupancy more than mandated, students/faculty/staff not wearing proper PPE in campus buildings, etc)?

- John thinks this is on the Back2BU website, will check. This is very important, every person in the department should know this info

Q: Will the administration provide an active survey to monitor TF working hours and workload throughout the semester to ensure that TFs are not forced to work over 20 hrs/week due to the LfA model?

- The expectation is that it should take up to 20 hrs/week on average (some weeks could be more, other weeks lighter)
- Couple of places where any excessive demands on TAs could be brought up: during BE 801 discussion class (this is only for first year TA's though. Sol does a good job of tracking this, can also go to Christen or Mary)
- Mary: Sol is a good person, or me; we can try to resolve the issues. Hybrid model is definitely more work but there are ways to do things to make your life easier
  - Mary: Most of you did not TA in the Spring 2020
  - There will be a learning curve to get class up and running
  - More work but not insurmountable challenge
  - Sometimes it can be Interesting to learn some of the ways to do things, different and challenging but may not be entirely negative. If have recordings could use in future

Q: Will instructors be notified if a student in their class tests positive?

- Yes, John thinks so but will confirm

Q: Will there be back-up TFs in place for when a TF gets sick/is exposed and must quarantine?

- John: I have thought about this but have not come up with a system yet. What do you do if a prof gets sick? What we're doing for profs may be similar to what we do for TFs
- If someone tests positive but has mild symptoms, they can teach remotely until they clear it up
- If someone is severely symptomatic they may need a replacement
- John would be happy to compensate student who covers another TF from Day 1. However, don't have nearly the money/freedom (spending has to be approved by provost's office). We have very little discretionary funds, but would certainly be happy to do this. Can follow up about this
- University initially said we can't hire student employees hourly, but they backed down on this, so will probably use this option to compensate people who cover for sick TFs

Do TFs need to clean classrooms after each use? If so, will supplies be provided?

- Don't think this is TF's responsibility
- Custodial services will probably take care of it
- Classrooms may have cleaning supplies, but not sure
- Students are not expected to be cleaning extensively
- John met with profs with big classes: talked about this in context of BE491, because custodial staff don't usually go into lab spaces. Undergrads will clean before and after lab
- Not sure how often classes will be cleaned (will they be cleaned after every class change?)

BME Student questions:

- Q: Do instructors have authority to cancel class if people don't show up with masks?
  - Yes
  - Rumored that there may be an anti-mask facebook group at BU
  - Purportedly, BU admins are planning on telling this fb group that they will be disciplined if they do not comply with mask wearing protocols on campus (GWISE note: see [compliance and enforcement policies here](#))
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  - Must have 100% compliance
- Q: If your course becomes cancelled a lot, will it still count towards your TF requirement?
  - Don't think it will get to this extreme
  - If people show up without masks, will just ask people to leave class

- Shouldn't disrupt class for more than a day or two
- Q: Is there a plan for standardized material distribution, standardized protocols/guidelines? Especially since some TFs teach outside our department (BME)
  - Not heard about standardized info
  - Protocols in place: De-densified classrooms, social distancing
  - Up to you to figure out how to convert your course effectively
  - BME will think about this to maybe create guidelines
  - Example protocol: going paperless for all materials to avoid contacts
    - Masks seem to be most important, contact through objects is less important
    - Very few classes will have all students in the classroom at the same time, so probably have to go paperless anyway
  - We have very good graduate student friendly faculty, please feel free to talk to them about your concerns
  - Not everyone is TAing in BME, but everyone is TAing in College of Engineering, so could make standard guidelines for college
- Q: Are TA office hours and discussion sessions enforced to be remote?
  - No one is planning to have office hours in person → bc they are hard to control
  - Discussions could be controlled and de-densified, there is pressure to have these be in person (but not as much pressure as for lectures)
  - If an individual student feels in danger, come to Mary Dunlop or John White
  - Handful of students will be teaching out of BME, if they feel unsafe, they should still reach out to Mary or John
  - John is now making it a rule that office hours should not be in person, they must be held remotely
- Discussion: Regarding lab courses (BE 491)
  - Tricky assignment
  - We have the room to hold everyone 6 feet apart, problem is how do you interact 6 feet apart? Will be different kind of interaction
  - BE 491 TFs: BE 491 (taught by Economo and Alex) is doing all remote with Arduino based kits (mailed kits, encouraged to do lab at home). Still working on whether there should be an instructor in person. Videos for students to follow at home. If they want to do the lab in person, they still have to bring their own kit.
  - John: You can't have TFs within 6 feet of students
  - Labs have good HVAC systems, most classrooms have updated HVACs
  - Will be interesting to see how it plays out if undergrads want to be in person or remote
  - Hard to do labs in person, without coming within 6 feet, but coming within 6 feet is absolutely not allowed
  - BE 125 TF (taught by Attaway): don't have many concerns, coding class will be entirely online
- Q: Compliance is going to be a problem from undergrad side, are there any enforcement to make sure undergrads are following testing protocols?
  - They need to sign a form acknowledging they will follow BU's rules

- Will have to demonstrate that they've met testing requirements (some type of ID/pass on phone)
  - John: This is the core issue. We are going to know (via badge/pass) if students will have missed a test or have had a positive test. We can't allow their bad behavior to endanger us or their peers. Faculty are also very concerned about this. But, all in all, enforcement should be prof's job not graduate TA's job
- Q: Contact tracing, if a positive person is found in your classroom, what is the procedure? How will this impact TA's? What is the depth level (ie. how many people have to quarantine/be tested)? If I am potentially exposed, do the people I live with, have to quarantine/get tested as well?
  - John: I wish we had Cathie here, contact tracing is not going to be app based (too much invasion of privacy), but instead based on interviews
  - John will find out more about this
  - Depth question is going to be a university policy, we'll find that out and get back to you
  - Have to think about this for undergrads in research labs as well (if they test positive, your entire lab shift will be asked to self quarantine and be tested).
    - This happened in BME dept this summer: someone had COVID-like symptoms, shift went home to quarantine, cleaned everything (everyone tested negative, including original suspected case). Not sure if this is standard for all labs or TAing but will find out
  - Mary: 4 days quarantining is not necessarily the amount, there is a guideline for the number of negative tests you need to have in a certain period
- Q: Do we have any early signs about efficacy of testing at such high rates of testing? Are there high false positive/negative rates?
  - John: talked with Cathie about this yesterday, test will be anterior nasal swab which is as effective as original type of test (Nasopharyngeal swab)
  - Very few false positives (very very small %), however some false negatives
    - This is good news, because it means we can do frequent testing without causing high Type I error rate
  - There has been research done on spread at universities: the number one factor that controls spread at university is frequency of testing (not necessarily based on efficacy of tests)
- Q: Will there be cameras in discussion classrooms so that discussions can be recorded easily?
  - John: I've been told that there will be cameras in every classroom
  - Mary: Faculty have been asking if they can get into class in advance to test it out, that should be possible.
  - John: This is tricky for office hours especially for difficult classes (BE 403)
  - Mary: I have an iPad, obviously not everyone has this. Alternatives: you can write on a piece of paper and show it to the screen, use whiteboard functions in zoom, annotate in pdfs.
  - John: For office hours, there was originally a possibility of having rooms with cameras and whiteboards, but it's presently hard than usual for BME to schedule

rooms, but will think about this. If TA's can hold office hours in real room, writing on board, while being recorded etc with all students watching remotely, the virtual environment will still feel like office hours

- Q: What is the cutoff for shutting down at university level?
  - John: You all have come up with every question I thought would be a hard question
  - BU apparently will set up a dashboard with positivity rate, which will be made public
  - They have a cutoff, but have not told us what it is. They must know what this “plug pulling level” is. Ken Lutchen has asked them to be more public about this information
  - Mayor of Boston is pretty conservative about this crisis and he will pull the plug if necessary
- Q: Follow up question, is the research component going to have a different threshold for shutting down?
  - John: if we had a serious outbreak on campus, that would affect research labs as well. But, could imagine a circumstance where we move to remote classes because positivity rate goes too high but students still stay in town and labs would remain open
  - These problems (of when to close university, teaching, research) are obviously coupled but not necessarily treated the same. John hopes we can keep labs open, we lost a lot of momentum between March and July
- Q: What about people from out of state, what is the timeline for when students should come back? How will testing be implemented?
  - John: BU is bringing students in starting next week (8/3) in small numbers and testing and isolating them as they arrive
  - Through August, they will continue this. Undergrads will not be free to come to class until they have 2 negative tests (Note: it's actually 3)
  - Grad students and faculty will start getting tested before classes start but may only be the week before
  - Massachusetts rules changed as of Aug 1: if coming from higher risk state/region/country, you are obligated to quarantine for 14 days
  - Not sure if BU's move in rules are targeted state by state
- Q: Is this (quarantine policy) only about people who live on campus? Or does it apply to everyone?
  - John: if they live off-campus, no one is enforcing their quarantine *but* testing protocols are the same. Still need negative tests before can go to class and will be tested twice a week thereafter (undergrads)
- Q: Do we know anything about how they will enforce quarantines in dorms?
  - John: If they are in contact with people who are positive, they will be moved to apartment where they will be monitored
  - When they're arriving from out of state is the most dangerous time
    - Around Thanksgiving will be another dangerous time, as BU has made the decision not to go remote after the break

- Discussion: Grad housing buildings issue
  - John: The building above Scoozi and also some of the buildings across the Pike will house students who have contacted a positive person
  - Nobody who has tested positive will go in these buildings, only people who have been exposed to a positive person
  - Christen: there were memos sent out to everyone living in these buildings as of July 30th
- Q: Follow up, what about if they're awaiting testing? If they've had contact they'd be moved to grad housing and if they're awaiting test results, they will still have potentially exposed grad tenants to a positive person?
  - John and Christen don't know.
  - John: I'm sorry, I wish we could do something about this. They didn't tell people about this, almost as if they didn't intend to tell anyone about it.
  - What do we do when people are misbehaving? Have to find a way to report without retaliation
  - Apparently someone will be delivering food, clean linens, etc to residents in quarantine/isolation
  - John will go back and check and see if he can put pressure on admins about this
  - Scoozi building has modern HVAC systems but this may be more unnerving because you don't know where returns are, filters are, etc (can't see them)
  - Older buildings you may be more aware of HVAC systems (even if they are old, at least you know where they are venting to, etc)
  - John: If there's a message you want us to deliver it, I can deliver it
- Q: If classroom attendance starts dropping do profs/TFs have discretion to move class to remote?
  - John: The fear of the administration is that students will come back and then if we try to keep everyone remote, parents will feel like "why are we paying so much for this Zoom education". If students are going to have an experience that approximates normal education, we will be ok
  - In this situation, can ask remaining students if they would like to go remote
  - From survey admins did: most undergrads say that they want to come back to campus for sure ( $\frac{2}{3}$  of them say they want to attend in person classes). Perhaps this will change when they come.
  - Mary: The students didn't like learning remotely, so would be surprised if numbers drop
  - Don't know if the fact that it will be a completely different "in person" experience (e.g. masks, social distancing, no group work, no interaction, etc) was taken into account in surveys
  - It's definitely not going to be the same. Not sure if anyone can answer that until they experience it. One possibility is that they show up, don't find classroom experience as good as before, and shift to remote
- Q: Has BU said anything about testing for people who are in direct contact with us that are not members of the BU community (roommates, family members, other loved ones, etc)?



- John: Don't think that BU will provide testing for people outside of BU
- If they've ramped up ventilation, doing lots of testing, and everyone is playing by rules, hopefully this will not be a large problem
- If we test positive, maybe we could ask for exceptions to rule (ask for our loved ones to be tested). Not sure if it would be granted; but maybe could get a test for someone especially if positive cases started on BU soil. John will bring this up
- They should want to know this since you'll be interacting with people in greater Boston outside of BU

#### WRAP-UP

- If we have any other questions, contact John, Mary, Christen. They will try their best to answer them. Feel free to follow up on questions that John said he would check on
- GSC: If want to make anonymous comment/question, route through GSC. Also anonymous feedback form on GSC website.