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TO: Boston University PhD Students

FROM: Jean Morrison, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer *JM*
Daniel Kleinman, Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs *DK*

DATE: June 30, 2020

SUBJECT: Clarification on University Guidance for PhD Programs

Earlier this month, we shared a set of guidelines with the leaders of your programs, schools, and colleges about PhD programs this coming fall, with a particular focus on the options available to PhD students who are unable to return to Boston for the fall 2020 semester. We understand that these guidelines, as originally communicated, caused some confusion and concern; we are sorry for this. We are writing today to provide some additional context and clarity on this important issue, and to correct some misunderstandings that have emerged. For those of you who have also received information on this topic from your program leaders, we hope this message is complementary and useful.

We want to provide two points of clarification, with additional detail below:

- First, if you are unable or choose not to return to campus in the fall and you do not receive approval to do your service remotely, *you may continue to receive your health insurance*. To continue to receive this benefit, you must be registered as a full-time student, either by enrolling in remote courses or, if you are in the dissertation research/writing stage, by being certified full-time by your school or college.
- Second, we are working to support our international students as much as possible during this period of disruption, given the regulatory issues that are in effect.

We hope to welcome as many undergraduate and graduate students as possible to campus in the fall, and as a residential university, this is core to our mission. The return to campus may be especially important for our most vulnerable students, some of whom face significant challenges to engaging in remote learning. That being said, we understand that some of you may face insurmountable travel challenges or may be unable to return to campus for health or other reasons. Graduate teaching fellows were given the opportunity to [request a Workplace Adjustment](#) if they, or someone they live with, are in a CDC High-Risk Category, or are pregnant. Those requests are still being processed and if you submitted a request, you should be hearing from your department about your status for the fall.

Our goal, and that of your academic program, is always to be as flexible as possible in working with individual situations. However, we are not able to guarantee that all PhD students will

receive their full stipends regardless of their ability to fulfill the responsibilities associated with that stipend. Many PhD stipends are provided in support of undergraduate instruction; the University's decision to offer undergraduate and graduate courses in a blended modality of remote and in-person learning, known as *Learn from Anywhere*, necessitates an on-campus presence of faculty and teaching fellows to offer the residential education that is so core to our mission. Further, PhD stipends that are provided in support of scholarly work and research that must be conducted in on-campus spaces and labs also necessitate an on-campus presence.

We know that health insurance is a particularly sensitive topic at this time, so we want to be clear: if a student does not or cannot return to campus, and cannot fulfill their service responsibilities, they may retain their health insurance by enrolling as a full-time student, either by enrolling in remote courses or, if they are in the dissertation research/writing stage, by being certified full-time by their school or college. As you know, the University covers the cost of this health insurance and provides tuition remission and payment of mandatory fees for full-time PhD students.

Another topic that has caused concern involves the challenges associated with paying international PhD students living outside of the US who cannot come to or return to campus. International students who receive stipends while overseas could be subject to additional tax laws, payroll surcharges, and other regulations in both the US and in their home country, compared to students paid in the US for service performed in the US. The University may also have additional taxable responsibilities in another country when paying individuals while they are overseas and could face significant added expenses. Thus, a different set of guidelines apply to international and domestic students who are paid inside and outside of the US. We will continue to work with all of our international students to explore what options are available to them and to bring them to campus as soon as possible, but this constraint is an unfortunate reality of our current regulatory environment.

We have compiled a set of FAQs that respond in more detail to some of the questions we have received from PhD students and their departments. These can be found online at <http://www.bu.edu/grad/covid-19/faq/phd/>. We hope that this information is helpful in clarifying the University's approach to what is, undoubtedly, a deeply challenging time. Throughout the summer, as more details about the fall are finalized, you can anticipate receiving additional communications from your program director and/or director of graduate studies. If you have additional questions at this time, we encourage you to speak with your program director or to contact Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs Daniel Kleinman at dlklein@bu.edu.