



29 March 2020

Greetings to all of the members of the University community,

We are beginning the second week of the Spring Semester, still under the heavy shadow of the Corona crisis. We are continuing to issue regular updates on all new developments. You can find all of the updates on the University's website.

The present letter will focus on three important issues: online teaching; extensive Coronavirus-focused research being conducted these days at the University; and the important contribution being made by the Faculty of Medicine and our faculty and students in dealing with the pandemic.

We have completed a week of online teaching, and we can say that we have done so successfully. The pre-existing conditions were difficult. In one shot, we transitioned from relatively minimal remote teaching to almost full remote teaching, all under very severe employment restrictions on the administrative staff, imposed by external factors. Our administrative staff's mobilization under these conditions is nothing short of miraculous. The excellent work of the academic staff and the cooperation and understanding of our student community completed the picture, and together, all of these efforts have led to success that is even greater than we expected. We are not ignoring the difficulties that have arisen, which the support staff is helping to resolve on an ongoing basis. We assume that this week also, localized problems might occur, but our ability to solve such problems is growing, and we believe that the current teaching week will be even more successful than its predecessor. Please find attached a link to the [Rector's letter](#) that addresses the various components of online teaching in detail.

The University's researchers and scholars are participating in the worldwide research on various issues related to the Coronavirus, impressively. Across the University, there are currently undergoing, or are planned to commence, **over 50 different projects** of such research. These include, among others: Studies that focus on improving the diagnosis of Coronavirus carriers in various forms; research examining various options to obtain a vaccine against the virus; other studies are examining ways to strengthen the immune system to improve the body's ability to cope with the virus, and identification of genetic components that may distinguish between those who do not display symptoms and those who become severely ill from the virus; studies focusing on various levels in the chain of steps for the development of drugs for the disease; studies on the development of advanced materials to prevent infection; studies focusing on social, business, cultural and political issues related to the outbreak; and more. Attached please find a link to a [detailed description of these studies](#) being conducted across the University.

The Faculty of Medicine has enlisted to aid the health care system in a heartwarming way. In the virology laboratory at Hadassah, headed by Prof. Dana Wolf, who is also a full professor at the University, there is a process of diagnosis of virus carriers and virus patients from all over Greater Jerusalem, including those tested by Magen David Adom (MDA) personnel. The test is based on molecular techniques in which the University has vast knowledge and advanced equipment (robots and PCR devices). I am proud to note that Hebrew University researchers have been able to bring to



a significant increase in the number of tests of virus carriers by using inter-departmental equipment and through the University's skilled laboratory employees and doctoral student staff in the testing laboratories. It is important to note that the University, with Professor Wolf's help, has taken all of the necessary safety measures. For several days, continuous work has been conducted in the laboratories, in 24/7 shifts lab, hundreds of tests are being performed each day, and the number of daily tests performed is on the rise. The importance of increasing the number of tests for virus carriers is clear to all of us.

In addition, hundreds of students from the Faculty of Medicine are helping MDA take samples. The Faculty of Medicine, together with MDA, organized a crash-course on how to carry out the tests while maintaining the safety of the volunteers in the utmost way. Faculty of Medicine students are also integrated into the routine laboratories within hospitals that are affiliated with the Faculty, including Hadassah and Shaare Zedek. There are also both male and female students who have volunteered to babysit for the children of nurses and doctors, so that they can continue to work.

These students are being joined by students studying in other HUJI faculties, who are also volunteering in a variety of fields, including assisting schoolchildren and the elderly, and in other diverse ways. This is yet another expression of the beautiful reality that our students excel not only academically, but also in social and community activities.

We understand that many difficulties are arising during this period. Some of us are not working at this time, and many other problems are arising. Even at the university level, we are faced with significant challenges. As detailed in the attached Rector's letter, we have taken a number of steps to ease the hardship, and in the coming days we will take additional measures, to the best of our ability. The strength of a community is tested in times of crisis. We are not pleased, to say the least, that this particular opportunity to test the strength of our community arose on our way - yet we are very impressed with the results. The picture that emerges is of a community composed of many volunteers, which repeatedly shows its quite beautiful face.

Good health to all of the University community and to our families!

Best regards,

Asher Cohen

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