

3-13-30

Dear Students,

Like all of your teachers, I am really disappointed that I won't be seeing all of you when classes were supposed to resume on the 23 of March. And, like all of you, I am trying to figure out what exactly is meant by the fact that when we do resume, classes will initially be online. At any rate, to get us started, I have come up with an exercise that I am going to explain here.

The Coronavirus fits in well with the Global and Historical issues that we have been studying throughout the course of this semester. So, I think it would be useful if we spent some time over the rest of the semester thinking about it. Usually, what historians do is employ documents from the past to better understand it. But we will also be attempting something a little different. We will attempt to create some documents that historians of the future will be able to use to understand what is happening today as we enter a crisis that at least for all of us is unprecedented. In particular we will create a document about how people are experiencing the present – their everyday reality (is it changing?) and their attitudes towards it.

So what I would like everyone to do is to keep a kind of on-line class Coronavirus journal on a Moodle Forum as events progress. This will give us an opportunity to record what is going on around us, our feelings and attitudes towards it and to reflect on it critically either from the point of public policy and/or global history.

Your first assignment is to write (on the Moodle forum for next week) a two paragraph or more entry in which you talk about one or more of the following issues. What is going on in your community? How do you, your family and friends feel about what is going on (are we doing too much or not enough)? Is your life changing? Are you disappointed or anxious or indifferent? How do you feel about things? I would also like you to read newspapers and other things on-line and post to the forum articles that you think the class would find interesting. Also, feel free to raise questions that you would like me to answer or the rest of the class to consider. You can post multiple times to the forum and you should ideally comment (always politely) on other people's posts.

Here are some guidelines. This is an experiment. It means that if you participate thoughtfully, you will get a good grade. No worries. You should try to write clearly, but I will not be nit picking your writing. I may, however, make some suggestions to the group about issues that we all need to work on. Also, while debate is good, you must always be polite and never attack or criticize anyone. That means even if you feel offended about something someone says – even if they say something objectively offensive – don't respond in the same tone. How do you respond politely? If someone says something that you believe is obviously false, you don't call them a liar or say something harsh. You direct your comments not toward the person but what was said (don't make personal criticisms) and you explain, using reason and evidence and in as polite a manner as possible, why you think something is misleading. The same if you find something offensive. You don't directly call the person a racist or sexist but explain using reason and/or evidence why you think what was said was offensive. Of course, I don't believe this will happen and if you do have issues with something someone said, just email me and we'll think of something together. I expect this will be useful and positive for everyone.

I am not requiring you to write before classes resume but I want to encourage you to write right away for two reasons. The main one is I want to have your perspective on this Corona virus out-break at the very beginning (at least in the US), so that we can look at how our views might change over time. In the second place, I want us to get used ASAP to communicating effectively online.

Please let me know by email if you have questions or concerns. I am also happy to speak with you by phone about issues concerning class or things more generally.

Best wishes,

Peter Pozefsky
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