Dear Students,

Welcome back to class—virtual edition. I hope you all are well, though I am sure many of you are not. Hell, I’m not. Yet here we are.

I have missed our meetings, discussions, and weekly time together. Though we will not be returning to that, I am still slightly reassured by the fact that, at the very least, we are back in semi-regular contact.

This email will explain my thinking on how our semester will proceed, with the obvious caveat that, as so much is changing so fast right now, I can’t say for certain that there won’t be more changes to the plan. Consider this is a rough guide, and please read carefully.

Before we left campus, a handful of you showed up in class to discuss a plan. But so few of you were there that I need more information to be confident my plan will work…as planned. Please now take less than one minute to fill out this short anonymous survey that will help me gather information on your whereabouts, internet access, health, and course interests. <https://middlebury.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0lgW7Ow8Zx5KbYN>. I need this information ASAP.

Roughly, the plan is as follows. This point is not to recreate our class online, but to try and make the most of our time and situation to better to understand what’s happening around us. I’ve redesigned the syllabus to focus on how sociology can help us understand this whirlwind moment we are in. I’ve taken off most of the remaining theory and chosen readings that reflect a sociological analysis of the coronavirus impact—jobs, health, social change, America, catastrophe, community, the future. Ignore the paper syllabus, just focus on the online course readings. Same old link as before, different readings: <http://sites.middlebury.edu/soan0105mccallum/>

You’ll notice that the first thing on the syllabus is to watch a documentary called “How to Survive a Plague” about the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The film is available to stream on Amazon. I planned on showing it in class, but obviously that’s impossible now. I understand it’s now a thing to watch TV online with friends, etc, and I encourage you to do that with each other if possible. Here’s some ways to do it: <https://www.theverge.com/2020/3/25/21191604/watch-movies-friends-online-netflix-hulu-youtube-party-twoseven-metastream-amazon-hbo-scener>

I’ve paired it with a reading on protest and a reading on coronavirus. This will give us time to ease back into the swing of things.

I mentioned during our last day of class that I did not think it was a good idea to try and recreate our classroom environment via Zoom or some other platform. I think our class population is now spread over six time zones. Instead, I suggested low-fi, more self-directed learning. I have assigned one novel and one non-fiction book, plus some popular / critical writing that’s being written every day. I will try and get free PDFs of both of the books. This reading material is highly relevant yet, on the whole, I believe more pleasurable to read that your average social science text. We’re all in a bit of discomfort these days. But I hope that some of this class is not only useful but also an enjoyable respite from so much of what’s going on around us.

I hope that we can stay abreast of the news that might provide interesting sociological analysis. One way we can do that is through Twitter. You do not need to get on Twitter. However, if you are, please consider sharing articles that are relevant to this class. Sociological questions are everywhere these days, even if they’re not labeled as such. But you might see it. So if you see something, tweet something. You can find me on Twitter as [@jamiekmccallum](https://twitter.com/jamiekmccallum?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor) and use #SOCI105.

On the course website is an updated assignment sheet. It lists a number of different possible assignments from which you can choose to satisfy our new course requirements. It will be a final assignment due at the end of the semester. In between now and then, I will also ask you to post weekly responses to the readings on Canvas. I will post prompts and you can reply. Three or four thoughtful paragraphs is a good way to think about it. Use direct quotes from readings, cite your sources, etc. You can reply to others in the thread or just respond to the prompt. Later today, I will be sending you an email with a brief audio response to your first paper. I mostly had to grade these in the evenings, when my son was asleep, so my voice is rather low and unanimated. I thought I’d try offering verbal feedback this time. Please let me know if you have any questions or don’t get your file via email.

I’m well aware there’s a debate going on among students that has to do with the pass/fail option. I really do see both sides of it. I urge you to take this class as a pass/fail course, but I understand why you might make another choice, and you will not in any way be punished for opting for a letter grade. My expectation is that most grades will be much higher than usual as we all adjust to new circumstances.

I will hold regular office hours on Zoom on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. You can sign up for a 10-minute slot here: <https://calendly.com/event_types/user/me>. If the times I’ve allotted don’t work for you, please let me know. Otherwise, do not email me to set up office hours. You do not have to use my office hours, just as you never had to before. They are times for you to clarify the readings, ask burning questions, discuss a grade or assignment, etc, as you see fit. I’ve set them to ten minutes, but in reality it’ll be more like 9, since I might need a 30 second buffer between you and the person before and after you. This might change as we see how it goes. I care deeply about you all, but I may be more businesslike than usual, since Zoom is awkward and time is scarce. If this system doesn’t work, I’ll change it.

If you’re a sociology major or my advisee, let’s set up a separate time to touch base about the major in general. You can use the 30-minute thesis slots for that.

Please know that I live in a small house with two other people, and my “home office” will likely be the kitchen or the bedroom. I’ll also be regularly Zooming (is that a thing?) with many other students, colleagues, family, etc. It’s highly probable we will get interrupted and whatnot. I ask for your patience and you have mine.

Once again, welcome back. I hope you’re taking good care of yourselves and each other. If one of you or me should fall ill during this semester, I have a contingency plan for that. Just please let me know if we need to use it.

Onward ever,

Jamie