



## UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS

February 28, 2021

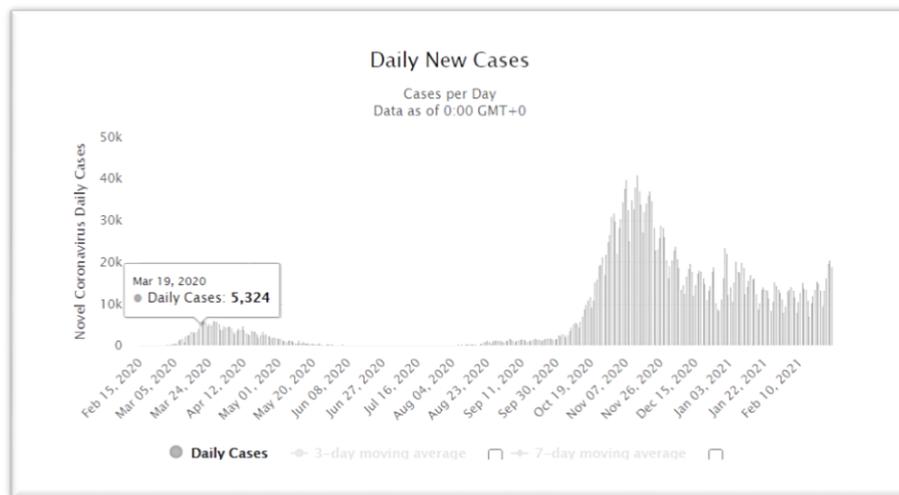
Dear Students, Parents, and Loved-Ones of the Spring 2021 Rome Class,

The purpose of this letter is to announce some significant updates to our spring 2021 semester planning in light of the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic.

### EVOLUTION OF THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC AND GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES TO CONTAIN IT

Between the date of [my first letter to you on November 12, 2020](#) and where we find ourselves today, much has changed. The semester has gone very well to this point—I am happy to say—yet some of our original forecasts about how events might have played out have turned out to be, at least in part and for reasons beyond our control, wrong. Instead of receiving more mobility to travel by early March 2021, as we had expected, the same restrictions that were in place in early November 2020 are still there, both for Italy and the rest of Europe.

One reason for this prolonged status quo has to do with the continued and steady spread of COVID-19 within the European population. As far as Italy in particular is concerned, as you can see from the graph below (source: worldometers.com), the second wave that we experienced in October-November 2020 came cascading down as we moved to Christmas, but then leveled off again, and unfortunately is now slowly forming into a potentially worrisome third wave.



The Italian government has been worried about both the persistence of the second wave and the prospect of a third wave for over a month now, i.e. ever since our students arrived. What's fueling these worries more than ever right now is increasing evidence of a number of [COVID-19 variants](#) in the country. Slow roll-outs to the vaccination regime and [a poorly-timed government shake-up](#) have not helped calm nerves either.

Actually, the Italian numbers I have just illustrated above are much more favorable than the numbers of new cases in the U.S. during the same period of time—or in other words, Italy was then and still is, less exposed to the risks of COVID-19 than the U.S. is. It's just that the Italian government, along with that

of its European counterparts, has been more aggressive, comprehensive, and invasive in its attempts to combat and contain the virus.

The newly-installed Italian government has done little with COVID-19 so far, except to prolong the previous administration's ban on travel between the various regions of Italy from its original date of expiration of February 27, 2021 to March 27, 2021. That February 27<sup>th</sup> measure had already forced us to update the semester calendar just before student arrivals, and now with this March 27<sup>th</sup> measure we are forced to relook things one more time. The same government is also currently in the process of drafting new and more definitive piece of COVID-19 legislation, the details of which we eagerly await in order to see if and how it will affect our planning for the future.

### **SAFETY IN THE ROMAN PROVINCE OF LAZIO AND ON CAMPUS**

Fortunately, we have not experienced any incidence of COVID-19 on campus to date. Our students have been admirably compliant with masking and social-distancing rules on campus, and as I have observed them off-campus they seem to be taking their Italian civic responsibilities seriously too. We had a mass testing on campus this last week—the first since students arrived—in which all students thankfully tested negative.

The bigger picture outside of campus—the spread of COVID-19 in Rome and in the province of Lazio in which it and we are located—is not altogether reassuring, nor is it anything close to threatening. At the time of student arrivals in the third week of January the risk category went from "moderate" (yellow) to "orange" (high). After a couple of weeks of lockdown, we then moved back down to "moderate" levels and have remained there ever since. Risks categories are determined on the basis of a number of variables, including the [R\(t\) number](#) and the amount of pressure on COVID-19 ICU units.

### **REASONS FOR UPDATES TO SEMESTER PLANNING**

In light of the above events and circumstances, particularly those restricting our normal rights to free and unlimited travel, we now find ourselves at a crossroads in the semester. On the one hand, we have duly and diligently attended to our academic work, completing over 60% of our classes within the first six weeks of our sixteen-week semester. On the other, the weight of so much academic activity and dedication (without any extended travel and leisure opportunities in-between) may be taking its toll and indeed calling out for such much-needed breathing-space and down-time.

As we all know, our original semester schedule deliberately uploaded classwork to the front part of the semester with the expectation that more freedom and mobility would appear toward the middle and end of the semester, when the class-load would then have lightened a bit. Well, that forecast has not worked out entirely as planned for the reasons discussed above, leaving us at a crossroads now that move toward the mid-point of the semester. To be precise, my sense is that most students are generally-speaking appreciative of how this semester's classes and program-sponsored activities have gone, and at the same time they are direly in need of a change-of-pace that will allow them more unstructured time and leisure.

### **NEW CALENDAR, PROGRAM PARTICIPATION OPTIONS, AND REVISED SPRING BREAK**

Please see the attached, updated calendar of our program activities for the semester moving forward. We have already outlined these changes for students in a public meeting that took place after dinner on Friday, February 26, 2021. In the information you find below, these changes are presented officially and in greater depth.

*Program Participation Option #1: Opt Out of the Remaining In-Person Part of the Semester and Return to the U.S. by March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021*

I have no current knowledge of any student who is so unsettled by this semester's recent planning changes and so concerned about our prospects for completing the semester successfully that that he/she would prefer to go home at this time. It would be reasonable to assume, however, that some students may indeed find themselves in this position and accordingly feel more comfortable returning to the States than staying here for the rest of the semester. For these students, we are ready to provide the following option:

- Return to the States by March 8 and finish remaining classes on line.
- Receive pro-rated reimbursements of unused room and board fees.
- Receive full reimbursements for the Northern Italy and Greece group-trip fees.

*Program Participation Option #2: Continue with In-Person Part of the Semester and Head Off on Spring Break on a UD-Rome sponsored trip.*

For those students who are more comfortable with accepting the uncertainties of our current experience—both the past and present changes we've needed to make, and not impossibly more to come in the weeks ahead—we invite you to read the updated calendar of activities carefully and take special note of the upcoming **Spring Break**. As you can see, in an update to our February 14<sup>th</sup> calendar, we have moved it from March 12-30, 2021 to March 8-15, 2021. In addition, we have redefined the very concept of Spring Break to a degree, to include programmed activities sponsored and supported by UD Rome. In normal semesters, students just go away on Spring Break all alone and with their friends, without expecting or wanting any support from UD Rome except in case of emergencies. This semester is different because of the challenges of COVID-19 to free travel and mobility. For this reason, we have decided to step in plan activities for those students who wish such assistance.

The three activities that we are ready to plan and financially subsidize for students are as follows:

- **A Mediterranean Cruise**, calling in at the ports of Naples (mainland Italy), Valletta (Malta), Palermo (Sicily) and Genoa (mainland Italy). See the general cruise details [here](#) (even though the English site does not capture our dates correctly). Although this cruise cannot favorably compare with our own educational travel options, we think that it will nonetheless provide an inspiring, relaxing and informative experience for students who want to see the broader world around them. Not bound by current COVID-19 restrictions on travel between Italian regions, the trip includes\*:
  - Seven-nights lodging in double-room, internal cabin. For an upgrade, students can pay an extra €110 p.p. to have a cabin with a sea view.
  - Three meals a day, including a limited drink plan at meals only.
  - All activities on board, such as games, tournaments, music, theater.
  - All services on board, including pool, gym, library, disco, jogging track, etc.
  - Religious services offered every day by our visiting chaplain, Fr. Marty Moleski, S.J.
  - Staff support on the boat for direction and in case of emergencies.
  - A UD subsidy in the total amount of €120 to use for excursions in each of the ports of call, with prices ranging from €30 to €85 per excursion.
  - COVID-19 cancellation and evacuation insurance.
  - A facility with rigorous and intelligent COVID-19 policies, thus minimizing the risk of contracting COVID-19 during the trip.

→ Transportation to and from the port of departure and arrival.

(\*Things we cannot control include but are not limited to weather, a COVID-19 outbreak on-board, and restrictions to mobility (and thus local excursions) announced last-minute by the Italian government because of COVID-19. What we do know is that this company has hosted over 40,000 visitors on its cruises over the last several months and has a trustworthy approach to handling COVID-19 cases on board in order to avoid getting stranded at sea.)

- **A Monastery Stay.** The region of Lazio is rich in natural beauty and history. Its convents and monasteries are located in some of the most charming and historic places. For students in search of some peace and quiet, time to reflect and pray, access to a chapel and daily religious services, and the natural beauty to wander around in, this trip could be a great option. The trip includes\*:
  - A single room
  - Three meals a day
  - Staff support for direction and in case of emergencies
  - Transportation to and from the monastery.

(\*We are presently in contact with three or four local monasteries, all of which seem like good options and whose management is excited about receiving our students. Depending on how much and what kind of interest students have, we will select a location early this week that suits their needs.)

- **A Week of Culture and Freedom in Rome.** For students who have not had enough of the Eternal City and/or would like to experience it at a time of year when the number of tourists is low and the weather generally sweet, this could be a very good solution. This trip includes\*:
  - A double room in a three or four-star hotel
  - Two meals a day
  - Staff support for direction and in case of emergencies
  - Three city tours of some of the little-known treasures of Rome by qualified local guides

Note that the value of each of the above offerings is roughly equivalent to the cost of your Northern Italy Trip, which you have already paid for (€750=\$900) but is currently on hold because of COVID-19 restrictions. If you choose any of the above options, therefore, you will not receive a reimbursement for the Northern Italy Trip. This part of your already-paid group fee is hereby being diverted to this Spring Break activity.

*Program Participation Option #3: Continue with In-Person Part of the Semester and Head Off on Spring Break on your own*

Just to be clear, with this option, students elect to remain for the rest of our scheduled in-person classes but just want to plan and experience their Spring Break on their own time. That's completely okay with us, but keep in mind the following guidelines:

- Campus closes at 4:00pm on Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup> through 10:00am Monday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. Students cannot stay on campus when campus is closed.
- If students remain in Italy, Italian COVID-19 regulations require they remain in the province of Lazio, given that is where they currently reside and movement between provinces is outlawed for tourists.

- If students elect to leave Italy for another country, they must keep in mind that all but a small number of countries (all outside Europe) have lifted COVID-19 travel restrictions for tourists. Students are therefore advised to make sure to check all relevant rules and regulations of the country of destination, including possible quarantines upon arrival, before booking their flights.
- No staff support is possible for logistical difficulties such as lost passports, travel strikes, difficulties entering and exiting countries, and the like. Emergency help is only available for extreme cases of health and safety security, and cannot only be guaranteed the extent that delivering such help is practically feasible during these COVID-19 times.

Note that students who choose this option for their Spring Break will receive a credit to their Irving tuition account in the amount of \$900, equivalent to the cost of the Northern Italy Trip.

### SUMMARY

To sum up this rather long and involved planning letter, let me thank and congratulate our spring 2021 students for their wonderful disposition and spirit over the course of this first month of the semester. The very same word of thanks and appreciation also goes out to our hardworking, resourceful, and courageous Italian, American and EU faculty and staff members—an extraordinary group of people, that's for sure. We have already been the beneficiaries of a whole lot of wonder and beauty and joy together this semester, be in it the realm of academics, religious life, student-life, or just our on-campus routines of being together. COVID restrictions and the COVID-19 virus itself have presented us with some unusual challenges and inconveniences so far, there is no doubt about that. Yet if we can continue finding something distinctively good and enriching in our current experience, whatever it may be, we will be better for it. The above plan has tried to give our students (and their loved-ones) as many safe, interesting, and feasible options as possible for proceeding ahead. We will be meeting with students in a public meeting scheduled for tomorrow, Monday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, to understand better whether they understand the choices before them and are ready to move ahead with one of them.

If you have questions about any aspect of this letter or a question more generally about the current state of affairs in Rome, please contact me at [phatlie@udallas.edu](mailto:phatlie@udallas.edu).\*

Sincerely Yours,



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Peter Hatlie, Dean, Director, VP, Prof. of Classics