


MEMORANDUM

To: Viterbi Faculty and Students

From: Yannis C. Yortsos, Dean 

Date: April 3, 2020

Subject: Competence and Character

The global crisis brought on by the COVID-19 rapidly spreading contagion has disrupted deeply how we interact and work. We live in unprecedented times. But we are more than ever before socially connected, through the marvel of the internet and its myriad technologies.

As we navigate these turbulent times, we know that you are an extraordinary group of students and faculty, well suited to respond to this disruption positively and creatively. We are all extremely proud of your work, your commitment and your concern for all members of the Viterbi community. How we react in these times of uncertainty tests our character, our values, and our ingenuity.

With the entire world undertaking an experiment of unprecedented extent and impact, we also have an unprecedented opportunity to practice what we preach. The opportunity to innovate and invent; to show our true character and values; and to work even more passionately in our mission to *engineer a better world for all humanity*, a goal more urgent than ever before.

With this memo, I call on all of us faculty to demonstrate our resilience, agility and inventiveness, as we work in the new on-line modalities. To create new methods of instruction and assessment, including tests and exams. To show empathy and understanding. To appreciate that some of our students are in vastly different time zones; that some others are encountering unexpected difficulties in availability, emotional support, financial resources. To exercise flexibility and creativity, and to help with one-to-one advising and mentoring as needed. And to sympathize with our graduating students (seniors, MS and PhD), whose near-term outlook has changed so dramatically in the span of only a few weeks. Let us exemplify our strong character and inventiveness.

And with this memo, I call on all our students to demonstrate, in this new environment, their resilience, agility, innovativeness and character. This crisis offers us the opportunity to further elevate our honor system (<https://viterbigrad.usc.edu/academic-services/academic-policies/>), to raise to yet higher levels our collective commitment to academic integrity. As you pursue your learning, as you take exams and other assessments remotely, in the sole presence of your own self, it is also your character, our values and our commitment to academic integrity that are also tested. Today challenges us to renew, uphold and further enhance this commitment. Let this semester be that seminal milestone.

The USC Viterbi community is a special family of compassion, ingenuity, outstanding technical competence, and strength of character. Let us use this time of challenge to further advance technical competence; and to further advance character. Together, these create a strong bond of trustworthiness, and creates people that society can trust.

Be well and safe, and fight on!