



## Personal Reflections

7/14/2020

Dear IMSA Community,

Over the past few months, I have written and sent out a host of communications on various topics, including fall plans and student fees, budget reductions, the status of SIR, @blackatisma and updates on COVID-19. Today, I step back to share some of what's in my heart about our situation at IMSA. Warning: this is my "personal reflection." As such, I'm going to share some of my thoughts, feelings, and reactions from a deeply personal perspective. I am not announcing new policies nor decisions in this Personal Reflection.

To those of you who have decided to continue reading it, thank you. I invite you to get a coffee or your favorite drink. I'm doing the same as I sit across the table, bridging time and space to share some of my perspectives.

**I'm heartbroken.** IMSA did not choose the COVID-19 global health crisis, or the emerging financial consequences of this pandemic, including the difficult decision to layoff one white history teacher and dozens of custodians, maintenance staff, administrative assistants and security officers, many who are Hispanic, for whom I hope people also care. While we did not create the coronavirus, we have navigated the challenges and changing landscape with imperfect knowledge and information as best as we can. I heard someone say that people seem to be tired of the virus, but the virus does not get tired. It continues to do its thing and spread.

I want to have everyone back at IMSA. More than anything, I would love to welcome our new Class of 2023 and welcome back "home" our class of 2022 and 2021. I want them all back on campus. Physically. I miss students transitioning between classes. When on campus, I often leave my office during changes in mods to see students moving about. I miss walking next door to the IRC and seeing students studying, talking, tutoring, and playing cards, while others are napping and catching up on sleep. Reading under the IRC skylights amidst our students is something I miss during our diaspora from IMSA.

I keep my window shades at my office at IMSA open, so whenever I see students outside of the Bio Lab, Room 207, or the Chemistry Lab, Room 200, waiting to go into the classroom, I can come out to unlock the door and wait with them for the faculty member to arrive. I miss that small interaction and get



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with them for the faculty member to arrive. I miss that small interaction and act of service.

It's silly for anyone to assume that we, myself or any other staff members at IMSA, are happy to plan for a fall opening via distance learning. All of our staff, including faculty and resident counselors, and I miss our students. We want to return to campus.

However, without proper health safeguards in our community that allow us as an IMSA community to return to campus for instruction and student life activities, we must maintain our physical distance. The coronavirus does not get tired of spreading.

I don't know how to state this more definitely. I am deeply sorry that we cannot be physically together in a safe manner. I want to open up IMSA. I want to bring students back. I want to have IMSA staff on campus. Yet, I will not put anyone in a precarious situation that may put them in harm's way. To borrow a quote liberally from the Apostle Paul, "What I want I to do, I cannot do, but the thing I do not want to do, that I do."

**I'm worried.** Extremely. Our community's mental health is top of mind for me right now. The pressure of living at home for students who tasted independent living in 1501, 1502, 1503, 1504, 1505, 1506, and 1507 concerns me. These IMSA students who are today's juniors and seniors lived independently for a while, and they also began to form deep connections with others in their rooms, their wings, and their halls. In an instant, the opportunities to see each other physically and relate with one another frequently went away.

It seems to me that not interacting often and living back at home has increased stress and anxiety for students. At home, they are taking on, appropriately, additional responsibilities for work, babysitting, etc. I'm sure that being home with family also has positive moments, and I don't want to minimize them. Nevertheless, I'm troubled by the harmful effects that our students' social isolation, their lack of frequent social interactions, and their "social" distancing are having on our IMSA community.

My disquietude extends to our incoming Class of 2023 who have never been



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on campus to meet my IMSA Staff colleagues who are also enduring physical distancing. (Please note that I always talk about the need to maintain physical distancing while ensuring that we are socially close to others. I do not want to be misunderstood: I encourage all of you to maintain your physical distance, at least, six-feet away, wash your hands regularly, and wear your mask!)

**I'm disappointed.** I see the recent social media posts, mass emails to IMSA Board of Trustees and state elected officials, and [change.org](https://www.change.org) petitions as campaigns of misinformation, or at the very least, campaigns based on misunderstandings. (For my response to these issues, see the [IMSA Update on COVID-19](#) addressing some of the misinformation.)

I cannot imagine that those who post on social media or send emails intend to harm our beloved IMSA, but that is their outcome. I believe that some want only the best for IMSA. I'm disheartened, not about the posts, emails, etc., but rather that IMSA students and alumni would arrive at conclusions without gathering evidence from credible and multiple sources.

**Finally, I'm elated.** Recent posts by Black alumni on an Instagram page, @blackatisma, can provide current allies for IMSA and me with the specific evidence we have always needed, but seldom had. The posts on the @blackatisma are heart-wrenching. Since I arrived at IMSA as the first Black Puerto Rican President of IMSA, I have worked closely with the Board of Trustees to develop and enact an equity and excellence agenda. I'm proud of our many accomplishments. But, I admit that I have failed some of the Black students at IMSA during my tenure, which began in September 2014. I commit to doing better.

With the new impetus and demands for antiracist actions through the @blackatisma posts, I am confident we will overcome. Given the public and private acknowledgements and commitments by the mostly white IMSA faculty, that they are committed to supporting our Black students and that Black Lives Matter, I am sure we will make significant progress.

I base my realistic optimism on three realities. One, the IMSA Board of Trustees fully supports our equity and excellence policy and intentions. Two, IMSA is ready to harvest Dr. Adrienne Colemans' 15-year tenure and



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foundational work planting seeds of diversity and inclusion at IMSA, and she is ready and has the expertise to accelerate our equity and anti-racism efforts. Finally, my leadership team is eager to do this work. I'm proud of them and how we have transformed the leadership composition at IMSA over the past five years. My team is ready for action. I'm ecstatic.

So... if you read to this final paragraph, thank you for joining me as I tried to share my heart with you. I hope this personal reflection and my previous ones allow you to "see me."

Respectfully,

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