WE DID IT!

On Monday March 16, after a mere two-day hiatus in classes, IRP study groups were up and running online. Over the weekend, the Tech Committee had provided a series of workshops to show coordinators how to use Zoom to run their classes, and a set of instructions for the participants to access classes. All parties adapted successfully to the new order, and every study group last week ran on schedule. One of our tech advisors (or TAs or Zoomers) worked with each coordinator during the classes to show film clips, slides, and charts; help guide class discussion; and make sure every participant was able to link in.

Noting the importance of the IRP to our members' well-being, the Advisory Board voted unanimously to cancel the spring break (scheduled from April 8 to 16) and keep the study groups going. It’s not like we have a nice warm climate to fly to!

Many members expressed their pride in the IRP and their gratitude to those responsible for our success this past week—the Advisory Board and Executive Committee, the coordinators who learned to lead online classes, the members who eagerly participated in those classes and, of course, the tech committee members who assisted all of them. Here is a sample of the comments we received.

Lots of praise and gratitude to the Tech Committee. Burt Freeman gave “special thanks to the committee for their wonderful performance during the week of 3/16.” Linda Wilson sent “congratulations to the Tech Committee and all of the others on moving us so smoothly and quickly to an online system. It’s pretty remarkable! I am so grateful!”

Also lots of appreciation for the cooperation between the Tech Committee and the coordinators. Susan Sabatino wrote to the members of Susan Herman’s study group, recognizing the performance of the coordinator and the tech advisor, Susan Rauch – as well as their shared first name: “Susans ROCK.” Jennifer Ross thanked the coordinators of the East European Film study group for the chance to discuss the clips of “the beautiful movie” shown by the tech advisor and also thanked the advisor who worked on her study group, Keep Calm and Carry On. She concluded: “I was impressed with the IRP when I joined, but now even more so.”

Some acknowledged the Executive Committee and Advisory Board: Judy Goldman said they “constantly rose to—no, above—the occasion” pointing to the search for a home and now the launching of online classes.
Virtually all of the comments included gratitude for the social connection the IRP provides in this time of physical isolation. Florence Tager applauded the creation of a “real community of learners” through the study groups. Rita Silverman expressed her gratitude to the Tech and Executive Committees but above all to her fellow members: “I love seeing everyone’s faces on Zoom,” she wrote. Sheila O’Connell said her “classes were wonderful and really help to keep my spirits up.”

Barbara Marwell wrote the most comprehensive assessment of the week, encompassing all of these points and more. Here is the more: (To see Barbara’s complete message, email her at bemarwell@gmail.com.)

“We are those elderly, deemed most vulnerable to the scourge of this virus. We are (mostly) New Yorkers, living in the epicenter of the virus. We are a group of people who grew up in a world of landline phones, newspapers delivered to our doors, radio (or fuzzy black and white TV) as a source of entertainment. Yet, within a week we have shifted from live classrooms to meeting online. There are still hiccups in deciding whether to raise hands electronically or wave your hand in front of your face until the coordinator acknowledges you; whether to “mute all” to minimize distractions or keep the sound on to create a more comforting classroom “buzz” … But this was only week 1. In these times of social distancing, I have treasured seeing the faces of my fellow students in those boxes on the computer screen... The meaning of this organization as a community has never been more powerful.”

More About Using Zoom
The Tech Committee is in the process of creating a collection of technology-related information that is useful to IRP members. While there are only a few “How to” and FAQs now, the committee expects this to grow as the number of contributors expands. This is a free Google site that does not require a password. Check it out by clicking here.

The latest versions of “Scheduling Recurring Zoom Meetings” and “Making Changes to an Existing Zoom Meeting” are on the site. These two documents provide instructions for all members on scheduling or changing meetings, including study groups, committee meetings, and lunch or dinner sessions with colleagues.

FROM THE ADVISORY BOARD

Meetings with The New School and CUNY Graduate Center
In the past week, our negotiating teams met with both TNS and the GC. As we reported last week, TNS meeting concerned our financial arrangements and it went very well though we do not yet have a done deal. The university representatives communicated an intention to transport IRP funds (annual appeal and various endowments, bequests and gifts) to the IER. They assured us that all rent payments to CUNY would come from our tuition and not our annual fund and also that we can take the IRP name with us; TNS does not intend to recreate the name or “brand.”

TNS will send a draft separation agreement for our review incorporating these arrangements. They will also send a proposed public statement and we will ask the GC to work with TNS to put out a joint
statement announcing our move. The agreement will be TNS side of the done deal; we are expecting it later this week. More to come, but so far so good.

The meeting at the CUNY GC focused on keeping to the timeline for our start there in the fall, despite the current turmoil in their operations as they change from an in-person to an online curriculum.

Summer School
We plan to field a summer school—of online Zoom classes. We will offer as many classes as we can. Watch future Observers for details but we are working hard to make this happen.

EVENTS
ALL WILL BE CONDUCTED ON ZOOM

Curriculum Workshops
Completing Your Proposal
Wednesday, March 25—3-4:30PM

If you are thinking about submitting a proposal for next semester or for the future and are struggling to complete your proposal for the April 20 deadline for the fall, please join us for the help you need. We'll assist you in:

- Developing a successful proposal
- Finding appropriate resources on your topic
- Organizing a working syllabus
- Completing the Proposal Form

The Art and Science of Leading a Discussion
Wednesday, April 1—3-4:30PM

Whether you are a new coordinator or a veteran, join us to share and learn strategies for enhancing your study group discussions

RSVP to Linda Anstendig via email to lanstendig@gmail.com no later than Wednesday, March 26, 10AM for the Completing A Proposal workshop or by Wednesday, April 1, 10AM for the Discussion workshop so that Linda can send you an invitation to join the Zoom session.

Current Events Group
Study groups are only the first of many uses for the Zoom platform. Steve Kalinsky will be starting a current events group that will run on Wednesdays at 4PM starting on April 1. Members interested in joining should contact Steve via email to stephenkalinsky@gmail.com. Steve will send you an invitation to join after you have submitted your response.

Women’s Group
There will be a Women’s Group meeting at 3PM on Thursday, April 2. If you have never been to a Women’s Group meeting and you want to attend, please send your email address to Arlyne LeSchack, lesca683@newschool.edu, and she will email you an invitation link to the meeting.

ACTIVITIES
Voter Registration Project Update and Notice
The IRP’s Voter Registration volunteers were able to register students and staff on eight Tuesdays and Wednesdays until voter registration activities were canceled on March 10 out of concern for safety. The following week, TNS canceled classes, thereby ending our activities for the semester.

The leaders of the project—Lisa Cristal, Ettie Taichman, Denise Waxman and Rita Silverman—said “We were
overwhelmed with the responses of the volunteers when we wrote to announce the end of our work for this semester and to thank them for their effort and support. The VR volunteers were unanimous in their enthusiasm for the work we did together and offered their support for continuing our joint efforts as early as we can in the fall. If we can continue in September 2020, we will have a short window to register students and others before early voting begins.

Therefore, we will be reaching out to the IRP community for your help with voter registration during September and early October. We will be in touch as soon as we have any information about an opportunity to register voters for the fall election. Please contact any one of us if you have suggestions for the project."

And here’s a notice for all IRP members from our Voter Registration Project:

GET YOUR ABSENTEE BALLOT NOW.
The Presidential Primary in New York is April 28. As you may not be able or willing to make it to the polls, it is essential that you get an Absentee Ballot. This Absentee Ballot will cover all upcoming elections from the Primary to the November 3rd General Election.

DON’T WAIT. DO IT NOW! Applications must be postmarked no later than April 3rd and received by the Board of Elections by April 8th in order to vote in the primary.

You can access your application for a NYS Absentee Ballot at: https://www.elections.ny.gov/voting-absentee.html

If you are voting outside of New York State, www.vote.org is a good service to use.

NYS requires that you provide a reason for voting with an absentee ballot. None of the six reasons offered covers the current stay at home situation. So, we suggest that you write in for Item 1, following "(check one reason)" the words “Other: Over 60, COVID-19 concerns.”

Completing the form, printing, and mailing it will take you less than 10 minutes, time well spent given the importance of exercising your right to vote.

Online Art Show

Istar Schwager provides our twelfth contribution to the online art show.

Title: The Beat Goes On
By Istar Schwager, Paper Collage

According to Istar: “I created “The Beat Goes On,” a cut paper collage, during Hurricane Katrina as a tribute to New Orleans. The collage is about overcoming adversity and finding hope during very difficult times.”
MEMBER FORUM

Staying in Touch

Contact Office
Please let the office know if you want to be contacted by telephone, email, or text during this period and/or whether you would be willing to call or email members who want to be contacted.

Let’s Talk
We’re looking for members interested in helping evaluate how members have adapted to Zoom for study groups, meetings and socialization. If you would like to join the discussion, please contact Jan Adler at adlerjan@optonline.net.

Calling All Men
Michael Switzer offers a suggestion for our male members. “We probably should all resolve to call at least one friend on the phone every day and speak about anything and everything for at least 15 minutes. The female IRP members don’t need this advice, but it doesn’t come natural to us, nor are we all necessarily good at it. We’re not too old to learn (that’s what peer learning is).

How’re We Doing?
In last week’s issue, we asked you to send along to Leslie Davis at ldavis7104@yahoo.com short items about life in virtual reality or social distance that you found funny or unexpected and also tips on how to negotiate these weeks. Leslie received lots of suggestions and lots of experiences. Please keep them coming!

Suggestions for Creative Uses of Zoom:

- Schedule the study group session 15 minutes before the official start time for a chat among the participants—or do the same for 15 minutes after the end time.
- Check the directory on the Zine to see who your neighbors are; arrange to go for a walk on a beautiful day. NB, you can sort the Zine by zip code to find your neighbors.
- From Frank Carden: How About a Virtual Lunch? I was speaking with my son about Zoom and how enthused our members are about using it, especially as it helps us fight our great enemy – isolation. Since one of the most important aspects of IRP for many of us is having lunch with old and new IRP friends, he suggested that we try having Virtual Lunch Hours together on the Zoom platform—don’t ask me. That’s what he calls it.” One person could set up a room at a specific time and others who wanted to join would be sent the required invitation. Since the host of the room would want to keep the number to a reasonable size, more than one “table” i.e. Zoom room, could be started. People could actually eat lunch while in the room or just hang out and be part of the group. (For instruction on using Zoom to host such events, see link under ‘More About Using Zoom’ on page 2 above.)
- Susan Rauch and Judy Goldman have taken piano lessons for many years from the same teacher, who lives in Queens. Adapting to the current actual reality, they now take their lessons via Zoom.
Talks of Interest
Sue Goldman recommends the Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College. She advises: “If you go to the Roosevelt House website for public programs, look on the right hand side for Recent Programs; many of them can be watched. I would particularly recommend the following which I saw:

Supreme Inequality
Author in Chief

Roosevelt House is also sponsoring encore performances of their best public programs. When you go to their website note their new postings, including a lecture by Gail Collins on the adventures of older women in American history.

What Are You Streaming?
This is the perfect moment to share some of the treasures we've found to help us get through these trying times. Of particular help are those binge-worthy series that divert and transport us from our current reality. Miriam Lawrence has volunteered to be the recipient of your suggestions. If you would send her an email with your favorite shows to stream, including where they are available, and a brief description, we'll circulate recommendations in this section of the Observer. You can reach Miriam via email to miriamiar@aol.com.

Miriam offers the first recommendation:
Shtisel
Netflix, 2 seasons
An Israeli drama set in a Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) neighborhood of Jerusalem that is truly binge-worthy. It sucks you into a world that you'd otherwise never have access to, with real, human characters that resonate whatever your background may be.

Movies: Feel-Good Faves
We’re happy to report early results from a survey of one study group (The Celluloid Skyline – New York and the Movies, coordinated by Lynn Brenner) in which participants were asked to list five movies they can always count on to lift their spirits. Many of these movies are available for streaming on Amazon Prime, Vudu, Roku, YouTube, etc. Do a quick Google search to find out whether a movie is currently available for streaming, and which venues are offering it. This is worth checking periodically, because streaming availability changes quite often.

What do we look for in a ‘feel-good’ movie? Two survey respondents sum it up. Maureen Sullivan says: “My ‘feel-good’ movies are those where goodness and justice triumph – and not necessarily legal justice.” Jay Fleishman adds: “My ‘feel-good’ movies often include pathos, which makes me feel good because of the directors’ and actors’ ability to portray this essential human quality.”

The Top Six, each mentioned more than once:
• My Cousin Vinny
• My Favorite Year (Peter O'Toole)
• Shakespeare in Love
• Princess Bride
• Tampopo
• Galaxy Quest

Many others, with one mention each, in no particular order, will be posted on the Zine under Activities: Movies.

How to Un-Tense with TV
• Judy Goldman had been recording re-runs of Columbo which are again on TV, on COZI. These now hit the spot, she says. “In a calm hour and a half, Peter Falk as the
• Michael Switzer, in the same spirit, reports: “My daughter who has an 11-year-old daughter and a 6-year-old son called me after they announced the New York City schools were closing. That closing resulted in a slew of comments online from mothers all over the city about what they would do with their children at home for months. Some suggested teaching the children to cook; make maps; bake; arts and crafts, etc. Finally, one mother wrote in saying, “Are you kidding? There will be NO crafts in my apartment. I am plunking my kids down in front of the TV 24/7”. That comment unleashed a tsunami of responses from other mothers to the effect of “Yea, thank G-d someone said it! Hooray!!”

Services: A Food Delivery Program
From Carol Sterling: “I was interviewed by the Associated Press on March 17 about a new nonprofit organization titled Invisible Hands Deliver. I was privileged to be one of the first recipients of this program that has been organized to provide delivery of food to older New Yorkers and other vulnerable people during the pandemic. I encourage other IRPers to take advantage of this caring community of volunteers who will deliver food and medical products (from the drug store) to your home.

To learn more, visit their website, www.invisiblehandsdeliver.com. On the website you will learn how to request a delivery. You can also call 732-639-1579 for more information.

Resources

IRP Zine
• To access the Zine, go to www.irpzine.org. To view the directory or IRP Faces, you must login with these credentials:
  o Username: IRPNewSchool
  o Password: Fall2018
  o For the fall and spring calendars, click here.
  o Member bios: https://www.irpzine.org/news/new-member-bios-fall-2016/
  o Observer Archive: https://www.irpzine.org/irp-observer-2/

Have Another Laugh
Lynn Brenner sends this keepsake for March 2020.

Commemorative jewellery to always remember 2020