DevCom Ligtas Na Balik Eskwela Position Paper 2022

On the Development Communication Ligtas na Balik Eskwela Campaign

Prepared by DEVCommunity: Philippine Development Communication Students Network

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Rationale

The COVID-19 Pandemic situation in the Philippines has worsened with the emergence of different variants like the Delta and Omicron Variant, negatively affecting the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of students, their family members, peers, friends, and the Filipino youth at large. This fear has left our Schools, Universities, and Colleges (SUCs) to continue to be closed in the hopes of restricting social mobility towards totally contracting COVID-19.

Students face harsh mental, emotional, and financial conditions trying to cope with remote learning under a global pandemic. This reality has made a lot of students choose between sacrificing their mental state whilst making ends meet or dropping out of school and removing themselves from their right to education. In a survey conducted by the National Union of Students of the Philippines-Southern Tagalog, they have found that 38.54% of 519 respondents are dissatisfied with the current remote learning setup while 36.99% remained neutral and only 24.47% of 519 were satisfied.

Development Communication (DevCom) Students are no stranger to these hardships, as with all other students from different academic fields and all other youth who are deserving of free education. The Study of DevCom, even amid remote learning, continues to reconcile its true essence of offering a rich study of the development process that communicative programs, plans, and activities aim to support.

Youth and Students of DevCom must be capacitated with enough access to the university and its facilities to live up to their development-oriented program. Development Communication has many contributions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and to fight for the people. There are many ways that our course can contribute to involving our community in public health community responses, communication interventions, and plans to support the informed decision-making of the Filipino People regarding their basic needs of food, shelter, healthcare, and financial support amid the pandemic.

With this, Development Communication Students and Institutions must be capacitated enough for nation-building and we believe that the gradual reopening of our SUCs with the conduct of face-to-face classes and activities can help support that goal. In line with CHED-DOH Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) No. 2021-004: Guidelines on the Implementation of Limited Face-to-face Classes for All Programs of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), there are initial steps in place mandated by CHED for the conduct of the gradual reopening, and we as a network believe that

this can be further capacitated and improved upon through our inclusion in the discussion.

Learning DevCom amid the pandemic has enabled students to continue to learn development and communication theories that can support the conduct of development journalism endeavors of writing articles that reflect the human condition of the marginalized communities, remotely studying and conducting educational communication activities and systems that support non-formal education, remote community broadcasting endeavors, understanding information management systems, and among others as well, trying to make a scientific inquiry and knowledge accessible to wider audiences.

With this, the development communication student councils and organizations hailing from different SUCs that offer development communication courses are now initiating the campaign entitled, **"DEVCommunity: Philippine Development Communication Students Network"**, a growing student-led mass campaign coordinating body that aims to unify development communication students to the call to gradually open the schools for development communication study and practice.

Resolutions for DevCom Ligtas Na Balik Eskwela

With this, the DEVC Ligtas Na Balik Eskwela Campaign aims to push for face-to-face classes and/or activities as soon as possible to address the learning needs of DevCom students. For the full realization of face-to-face classes, the appropriate steps are proposed to be undertaken:

1) Initiate the formation of **Adhoc Committees** composed of DevCom Students, Faculty, Staff, SUC Administrators in Coordination with the Local Government Unit to craft a **pro-student and pro-people timeline** for the **Gradual Reopening of Face-to-Face Classes and Activities** and ensure i**nformation dissemination** about SUC administrative plans on such.

   Multi-sectoral Ad Hoc committees that are focused on initiating activities, programs, and plans for the conduct of face-to-face classes and/or activities for DevCom students can help in bridging the concerns, learning needs, and suggestions of different stakeholders. The priority of this committee is to craft a timeline for the planning and implementation of Ligtas Na Balik Eskwela and ensure its coordination amongst the university, city/municipality, and regional stakeholders. Student representation in decision-making processes with regards to student welfare must be ensured with supported consultations and dialogues between students, their

administrators, and even local government units. There must also be ensured communication with stakeholder communities for future participatory development work amid the pandemic.

2) Initiate **Mass Vaccination Programs and Health Support** for DevCom SUC constituents in coordination with their respective LGUs.

There is a rising number of students wanting to be safe against COVID-19 by getting themselves vaccinated. With the coordination of schools and LGUs, free and quality vaccination programs can be conducted and made available for constituents within schools. This supports having safe and healthy conditions and protocols to promote a conducive environment for face-to-face learning which also includes subsidizing COVID-19 testing.

3) Provide **Psychosocial support** to DevCom Constituents who are in need.

The struggles of remote learning have produced detriments to the mental health of students, faculty, and university staff. Universities hand-in-hand with organizations can provide programs and services such as free online and physical consultations with professionals within schools... that could aid university constituents with the proper mental health support through psychosocial services and training.

4) **Stop the implementation** o**f stringent and repressive university policies.**

It is inhumane for universities to impose stringent and repressive policies that do not aid student empowerment and fulfillment, especially with the ongoing educational crisis. Students must be given the right to uphold their right to organize, not be limited by stringent tuition fee policies, haircuts, uniform requirements, and other stringent policies as may be deemed necessary to be stopped. The implementation of anti-poor policies such as required attendance, multiple gadget policies, and failing grade policies must be stopped.

5) Provide the **use of facilities** that can **support** DevCom's study and practice.

Students must be allowed to use university facilities that could support DevCom learning. University libraries, media laboratories, radio broadcast rooms, and classrooms can be used while abiding by minimum health protocols and when alert level conditions persist.

6) Initiate programs that can support the **provision of material and financial support** for DevCom students for their **production courses.**

DevCom learning and practice requires a lot of resources for it to be fully implemented and for learning objectives to be ascertained. Production courses require production resources like cameras, internet, radio materials, multimedia equipment, software, and the production of these also requires financial support. Universities must ensure that students have access to these resources.

7) Provide **comprehensive and safe plans** for the **conduct of Face-to-Face fieldwork.**

An integral part of the true essence of DevCom is learning with and from our marginalized communities especially those that do not have access to basic services. Most of our study and practice involves coordinating and communicating with our stakeholders and health-based and safety protocols must be planned, crafted, and implemented when alert level conditions are enabling for such.

8) In preparation for the gradual reopening of face-to-face classes and activities, SUCs must implement **academic ease** for students to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and different calamities.

The call for Ligtas Na Balik Eskwela must come with the call for Acad Easing in our universities. While constituents actively await and participate in their physical return to universities, academic endeavors must be pro-student enough that recalls the two years of remote learning to be reassessed and students are afforded compassion in learning. Maximum leniency must be exercised for all students, faculty, and staff with regard to deadlines imposed by the administration. Teachers must also be given enough time to prepare and recalibrate their curriculums in between semesters. This also includes not requiring synchronous classes, non-implementation of stringent academic requirement deadlines, limiting academic requirements to the essentials according to course learning objectives, and providing assistance for students, faculty, and staff.

9) Consider the empowerment of student councils and organizations by crafting plans for **opening student spaces in using facilities, supporting student needs, and services all according to abiding by health protocols.**

With health and safety protocols, student councils and/or organizations can provide adequate support for universities to assist their fellow students, inform their classmates on events and updates on school affairs, plan for DevCom learning, and even support university endeavors. Student spaces must be readily accessible to students for these collectives to work.

10) Stakeholders should commit to promoting Development Communication as a legitimate study and field that contributes to the national development of the country by asserting the **involvement and leadership of DevCom students and practitioners in local and national government programs and activities in combating COVID-19 and serving the marginalized communities.**

Development Communication practice has numerous contributions to social change, and it is high time that its students and practitioners are given platforms and opportunities to grow and promote DevCom as a legitimate and powerful field and tool to combat COVID-19 and social illnesses. Students and practitioners can join university and local government unit COVID-19 teams for different DevCom work, community interventions, and other leadership and support activities as may be deemed necessary by the DevCom community.

Timeline of Campaign

The said campaign proposes the said timeline for the program to be implemented through the following steps:

STEP 1: Form the Adhoc Committees to initiate the plans for a timeline and approval for face-to-face classes and activities for DevCom Students.

STEP 2: Conduct Learning Needs Assessments through Surveys, Focus Group Discussions, Consultative Mechanisms with Stakeholders by which student institutions and organizations hand-in-hand with SUC administrations can initiate to further collate data on the needs of DevCom students, their perception and/or willingness to involve themselves in possible plans for face-to-face classes and activities, and other student-related queries for gradual reopening related policies.

STEP 3: SUCs hand-in-hand with their DevCom students can craft data reports and adopt resolutions regarding the results of the aforementioned consultative mechanisms for the fruition of the gradual reopening.

STEP 4: Conduct consultations and dialogues between DevCom Students, SUC administrators in coordination with their Local Government Units to initiate the institutionalization of plans and timelines for the gradual reopening of face-to-face classes and activities.

STEP 5: Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Mechanisms in staying vigilant and overseeing all efforts of all stakeholders for the gradual reopening.

Manifesto of Unity

We, undersigned student institutions and organizations of our Development Communication Study, commit to campaign and push for Ligtas Na Balik Eskwela to serve the true essence of our study which is to serve with and for the people. We manifest our unity to campaign together for the full realization of the gradual reopening of face-to-face classes and activities in order for our capacity as facilitators of development to be fulfilled with our loyalty to the marginalized.

Member Schools/Organizations who take unity in the campaign

- *Adventist University of the Philippines Development Communication Student Council*
- *Alliance of Development Communication Students - Polytechnic University of Bicol*
- *Association of Development Communication Students - Camarines Norte State College*
- *Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges College of Arts and Sciences Student Council*
- *Central Luzon State University - Development Communication Student Council*
- *University of the Philippines Los Banos College of Development Communication Student Council*
- *Development Communication Society- Benguet State University*
- *Society of Development Communicators - Batangas State University*

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National Union of Students Southern Tagalog

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