

Subject: IMPORTANT: Message to faculty (re: COVID-19)

Date: Tuesday, March 10, 2020 at 4:44:14 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: System Human Resources <systemhumanresources@passhe.edu>

To: System Human Resources <systemhumanresources@passhe.edu>

Dear Faculty Colleagues-

Our higher education community is highly connective and collaborative, which how it should be. But it presents unique challenges when public health issues—such as Coronavirus (COVID-19)—arise that require more social distancing and intentional separation of those who are most at risk. That being said, our collaborative nature is also our strength as we work together to provide a high-quality educational experience for our students while safeguarding their health, safety, and welfare.

We want to thank everyone for working together to quickly respond to this evolving situation—specifically our faculty, chairs, deans, and provosts who have been collaborating at a new level to meet the needs of our students in the final months of this semester.

Below is guidance that we offer as you work through solutions that work best for your campus's needs:

Instructional and Service Modalities

In considering alternatives to face-to-face instruction, it is imperative that we maintain our commitment to students and ensure appropriate academic rigor toward completion of course objectives. In doing so, we must also understand that both faculty and students might need to familiarize themselves with new platforms or might have issues related to access and use. For face-to-face courses that migrate to online platforms, we understand that in-person courses don't automatically translate to an online or other modality, so it is important for all these reasons that we provide support for and patience with our students and faculty during this time. Faculty who employ alternatives to face-to-face instruction must also be available for online office hours.

For those universities that move courses to alternative modalities, please provide a short but reasonable period of time during which faculty and students can prepare before classes resume using the alternative modalities. The length of the preparation period would be based on and incorporated in the faculty member's plan for delivering the course objectives within the remaining time in the semester. Faculty employing non face-to-face modalities of instruction (e.g. online, by ZOOM, or by email) must provide their chairs and deans an explanation of how the course will be completed.

Each campus is empowered to work with their APSCUF chapter to address any possible policy implications related to the alternative modalities for the semester. Courses that shift to an online modality would not be subject to university curricular policies for approval of online delivery for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester (Article 41 of the collective bargaining agreement would not apply to these courses).

For those that are continuing with face-to-face sessions, we urge a liberal attendance policy so that students who self-quarantine are not penalized for missing class. Also, we urge you to work with any affected students to provide opportunities for them to complete the course objectives given their situation.

For non-instructional faculty who provide services to students (e.g., counseling/advising) we encourage you to maintain your accessibility to students through phone and video (ZOOM/Skype) sessions. This will be important as students face additional pressures and stressors associated with Coronavirus and the potential changes to normal academic rhythms.

Impact on Faculty Professional Development

It is important that during this time of flux, we ensure any steps we take to provide continuity of service to our students enhance our faculty's professional development and encourage exploration of new teaching modalities. Below are items for your consideration:

Where faculty move from face-to-face to another modality, they will use their best efforts to adapt to and engage in the new modality. At the same time, it will remain within the discretion of the faculty member whether or not to include student evaluations in performance reviews so as not to discourage innovation; nor should faculty be penalized for not submitting these evaluations. Peer evaluations should be completed to the greatest degree possible. Should it not be possible to complete a peer evaluation, department chairs and evaluation committees must provide the faculty member with a letter stating this fact.

For scholarship and service opportunities, below is an example notation to be included in evaluation documents:

“Due to the COVID-19 virus in the Spring of 2020, faculty member X moved a face-to-face class to fully online instruction on short-notice for the last N weeks of the semester. Additionally, the faculty member was unable to travel to conferences to present already accepted paper(s) and was not able to meet with certain committees/service groups due to meeting cancellations. Reviewers are reminded to include consideration of these exceptional circumstances in the review of faculty member X’s work.”

Off-Campus Experiential Learning

Where possible, we recommend that all internships, clinicals, and student teaching placements continue unless/until the host organization changes operations such that they cannot continue in some form. In the event that students cannot continue these experiential learning activities, universities will seek to provide alternative learning opportunities that will fulfill course objectives by the end of the Spring semester or as soon as possible thereafter.

In all of these efforts, we encourage university leadership and faculty leadership to work collaboratively to resolve any potential collective bargaining issues that might arise as new challenges emerge during this semester—seeking guidance from the Office of the Chancellor and State APSCUF along the way.

We encourage everyone to embrace the highest possible degree of patience, flexibility, and agility in the face of future uncertainty to ensure the best possible outcomes for our students, many of whom might undergo family hardships due to the circumstances. We also recognize that not every possible challenge can be identified in advance, but we remain committed to cooperation and mutual agreement as our preferred method for addressing these issues as they arise.

Thank you for all you are doing during this difficult time.

Dan Greenstein
Chancellor

Ken Mash
APSCUF President