Campus Operations: Important Considerations for Faculty and Staff

Monday, March 16, 2020

Dear Faculty and Staff,

As promised, here are some additional important details regarding campus operations as they pertain to faculty and staff. I apologize that this is coming so late in the day, but my Cabinet and I wanted to be sure that we could provide as much specific detail today as possible.

Of course, we are all trying to solve the challenge of how we can continue to do our important work while also ensuring our own health and well-being, as well as that of our family, friends and colleagues. We must do everything possible to encourage social distancing and “flattening the curve” of the virus’s rate of spread. Although we know that some employees will still need to work from campus, we are hoping that the majority of employees can work remotely. (For more about social distancing and what it means, see these articles from Johns Hopkins University and National Public Radio.)

Work schedules and locations: Staff who have the ability to work remotely will be allowed to do so after consulting with their supervisor. Obviously, some tasks cannot be completed remotely, and supervisors should be developing a continuity plan for their unit. Employees who continue to work on campus, however, should still prepare to bring home each evening the necessary materials in the event that they are not allowed to return to campus. We also recognize that employees may have additional unanticipated demands on them for child care, elder care, or other circumstances related to the coronavirus outbreak. Supervisors will be receiving further guidance shortly from Human Resources about how to proceed.

Sick leave and paid time off: Again, please talk to your supervisor. Above all else, we are doing everything possible to ensure that faculty and staff will receive their regular compensation. As part of this commitment, we promise that employees who are not able to work for coronavirus-related reasons will not have sick time deducted from their PTO balances. If you are sick and unable to work, your supervisor will take care of processing those requests, and we are working on adjusting our ADP system to take this new situation into account. The bottom line: if you are sick, stay home but make sure your supervisor is in the loop.

If you are sick, or if you believe your co-worker is sick: If you feel sick, please contact your physician or health care provider immediately, then follow up directly with your supervisor. If you believe your coworker is sick while present on campus, please inform your supervisor directly.

If your doctor orders a COVID-19 test: We have been informed that the College’s Excellus BlueCross BlueShield medical plans will cover the full cost of a COVID-19 test at no charge to the employee. Note that Excellus also offers telemedicine service, but employees must pre-register for that service (which is free) before making an appointment.
Remote teaching: We know our faculty have numerous concerns about changing course midstream and meeting their learning objectives via remote teaching, but we are confident that they will create solid and caring learning experiences for their students. We still plan to move to remote instruction beginning Monday, March 23, through the remainder of the semester. Faculty will hear from Provost Speaker on Tuesday with more details about remote teaching plans.

Technology: Our Information Technology team is also working hard to implement additional ways to allow employees to work remotely, including the possibility of setting up a Virtual Private Network (VPN) that would allow employees to connect to the campus network in a more secure manner, as well as a way to redirect their office phone line to a cell phone or other number. On the academic side, IT staff will be offering support for Moodle, GoogleMeet and Google Suite as the primary tools for conducting our remote-learning instruction. IT also advises, however, that employees who need access to College data from off campus should use OneDrive or email to transmit those files, not a flash drive or external drive, and should never save data on their home/personal computers. You will hear more from IT in the near future on these and other topics.

Events on campus: Due to Gov. Cuomo’s order today (March 16), which now bans all public gatherings of 50 or more people—as well as President Trump’s recommendation limiting gatherings to 10 people—all on-campus events scheduled for the next few weeks are postponed or canceled, including this Wednesday’s faculty meeting and Staff Forum and this Saturday’s admissions open house program.

Again, our Human Resources staff will be following up in the next 24 to 48 hours with additional details and guidance. I also encourage you to bookmark the wells.edu/covid-19-updates website, which will be updated regularly.

Please do not hesitate to be in touch either with your supervisor or with HR as we all work together through this enormously challenging period. Thanks for all you do, and please know that all your efforts are sincerely appreciated.

Jonathan Gibralter
President