

May 20, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

As I mentioned last week, in order to prepare for the fall, the University will shift gradually from our current mostly remote model to one in which more employees are working on campus. The first part of that process is developing plans and protocols specific to each department's operations and meeting with employees to discuss and refine the details. That process is starting this week. All plans will be based on University guidelines that aim to protect the health of employees, ensure the well-being of our community, and ensure continuity of our operations.

As part of our planning and preparation, the Office of the Dean of the College will hold two listening sessions for faculty members tomorrow, May 21, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. and 2 to 3:30 p.m. The sessions will give faculty information about the four scenarios for teaching that are being explored and give them a chance to share their thoughts on preparing for the fall. A process for follow-up questions will be available.

A separate session for students will be held on May 26. Additional sessions are anticipated to hear from staff members about the fall. Look for more information to come about those.

Also this week, Vice-Chancellor McCardell will participate in a video conference call with Sen. Lamar Alexander. Sen. Alexander chairs the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. He will share some observations about what he has learned about the COVID-19 pandemic from conversations with federal officials. He has invited university presidents across the state to discuss the plans their institutions are making to return students safely to campus. Knowledge gained from this call, along with what we are learning from the Health Department and our local partners, will continue to inform the University's planning process around public health and safety.

Here is an opportunity to add your voice to the historical record of the pandemic: In this extraordinary moment in history, the University Archives invites Sewanee faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members to tell their stories and share their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through documenting a variety of experiences, Archives staff hope to both foster connections within our community and preserve a record of individual and shared experiences for posterity and future research. You can find ideas for ways to contribute on the Campus, Community, and COVID Project page.

From My Perspective

I have been reflecting upon how moving from emergency short-term planning to longer-term planning for the fall has affected how we feel and express our anxiety. The short-term emergency planning supplied us with clear goals and tasks on a daily basis, whether it was writing a new policy for our employees or converting a lecture into a Zoom opportunity for our students. These tasks helped us focus our anxiety in a productive way, and we felt we were contributing to the solution. Now we are planning for the much murkier (FOGgier) future. It is hard to accept that

there simply is no answer right now to the challenges that the future holds. The fact that we need to plan for multiple possible futures is alien to many of us, making it difficult to focus and raising our anxiety. I don't have all the answers right now, and I need to keep telling myself that I don't need all the answers at once. I need the next set of answers to issues that move us forward one step at a time. This is really hard to accept. We can work, and are working, on several parallel tracks simultaneously.

I think of it as doing a jigsaw puzzle without knowing exactly what the picture is, but knowing what we want the picture to be. A jigsaw puzzle is done one piece at a time. So we have to continue to break it down into smaller bites and focus our attention on what we can do right now with some confidence that it will take us in the right direction. We can even work on whole parts of the puzzle outside the framework so that later we can put a whole section of the picture into place. That's essentially what the Fall Operations Groups (FOG) are doing—planning whole sections of our fall puzzle that we can put into place later on, depending upon how other parts of our puzzle develop. Is this easy? No. Frustrating and anxiety producing? Yes. But manageable? Absolutely. Break it down into what you can get done today while keeping the ultimate goal in sight.

One more thing. While it is time to look forward, please take a moment, take this whole long weekend, to appreciate what you have already done. Appreciate yourselves and what you have accomplished as much as those of us in the administration appreciate you. It is so tempting to dig right in. In fact, I know faculty started getting ready for fall even before they finished their spring semester grading, and staff in student life are looking to the fall while still helping students move their belongings out of the residence halls. And others are working equally hard to ensure we are ready for fall. But take a break this weekend. Take some deep breaths. Give yourself the luxury of a pat on the back and some serious downtime. You deserve it. As John McCardell is fond of saying... "it'll all still be here when we get back."

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost