

May 27, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Even as summer begins, the University is planning and preparing for the fall and the next academic term. That planning has two objectives in mind:

1. a gradual shift from mostly remote work to working on campus, and
2. a safe return to predominantly in-person teaching and learning.

Returning to Work On Campus

Our effort continues toward a gradual shift from mostly remote work to more University employees working on campus. As plans are developed that are specific to each department's operations, some employees in those areas will begin returning to on-campus work (Phase 1 of four phases).

A new section of the COVID-19 website outlines the components of the plan that apply to all employees. In addition to details about Phase 1 and what to expect in the short term, it includes information about the tools the University will use to monitor COVID-19 data, our campus prevention and sanitation practices, and a common set of terms and definitions so that we're all speaking the same language. [I encourage you to visit these pages](#); they will supplement the information your supervisors and I have shared.

Phase 1 will bring a return to campus in a limited capacity to include, for example, positions that are needed for campus safety or reopening, and roles that cannot be effectively completed from home and are critical to ongoing operations. It will require physical distancing, wellness screening, temperature checks, and other mitigation measures for on-campus employees. The new employee wellness screening protocols will begin this week in the Executive Offices, Facilities Management, and Dining Services.

Our Return to Campus plan aims to protect the health of employees, ensure the well-being of the community, and carefully and deliberately prepare for students returning in the fall. It is based on the most current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC); Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) rules and regulations; and other applicable sources.

The University is also following guidance from Gov. Bill Lee and his COVID-19 task force. Last Friday, May 22, Gov. Lee issued [Executive Order No. 38](#), which permits more Tennesseans to return to work in all industries where that can be safely accomplished by following health guidelines and maintaining social distancing, while still urging employers to allow remote work if possible.

The executive order continues to encourage strong social distancing measures while also allowing groups of up to 50 people to participate in social and recreational activities. Under the order, Tennesseans are urged to continue to limit activity and stay home as much as possible in order to preserve the health progress that has been made in our state. We all are advised to wear a cloth face covering in places where we are in close proximity to others; you will see that reflected in the University guidelines for returning to work.

Returning to In-Person Teaching & Learning

The Sewanee Fall Operational Group (Sewanee FOG) began its work last month. Seven teams are planning, in their specific areas, for how we will operate in the fall: College Academic Planning; Environmental Health and Safety; Student Support/Student Life; Student Activities; Information Technology; Undergraduate Recruitment; and School of Theology Academic Planning.

These teams are focused on creating a learning environment that keeps our campus and local community healthy and safe while still delivering an exceptional and fulfilling academic experience. While they are considering a wide range of scenarios, it is clear that life on campus this fall will be different.

Plans for a safe reopening, and a safe semester, will require a regimen of screening, testing, tracing, masking, and social distancing as well as a shared commitment by students, faculty, and staff to personal protective and risk-reducing behaviors.

From My Perspective

I don't know about you, but I have a hard time envisioning getting back to socializing in something of a normal manner. When I see a person on campus who I don't know, my first impulse is not the "passing hello," it's to interrogate them to find out who they are and what they are doing in "my" space—like the whole Quad belongs to me. A few weeks ago some very good friends got in touch to ask if we wanted to have wine on their back deck with another couple one evening. At first, all we could envision was the usual collection of bottles, glasses, shared snacks, and mingling. Sure, their back deck is big but three couples sounded like a veritable frat party! Of course, it was not. We all agreed to bring our own drinks and glasses. Our "hostess with the mostest" made each couple their own plate of snacks, each at their own table and we had a wonderful time just chatting for two hours. It was amazing to see these very dear friends in person, and talk without the awkwardness of Zoom freezes and interruptions.

I think about this as we start to take steps to return to work together on campus. It is why we are planning a phased return. We will each need to adopt new habits that become second nature. We'll need to trust that each of us is continuing to do our part to keep everyone safe, even as we do more together. The gathering at our friends' house showed me that we can come back together. It's different, but in the important ways it was perfect, and perfectly safe.

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost