



Office of the Chancellor
THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

March 18, 2020

Dear Presidents and CEOs,

Thank you for the continued efforts of you and your leadership teams, faculty, and staff as we work to control and limit the spread of COVID-19 within our populations and in communities across the state and nation.

Our primary concern at this time is the health and safety of our campuses and communities, but we must also remain focused on our academic mission and the support of our students and faculty. Earlier this week, Governor Abbott waived restrictions on student work-study programs to insure that during the coronavirus response in Texas, we “do all we can to help college students stay on track to earn their degrees.” Our System will continue to support our students’ success and to meet our land grant mission through education, research and service, even during this extraordinary challenge.

Our goal as public institutions and members of our larger communities is to provide our students with a safe and welcoming environment in which to continue their education, even if it is being delivered online. Unlike some of the other university systems, we have decided to keep our universities open for all students who wish to be here. We believe this the best way to help students succeed and to have access to the services they need for that success, including lodging, food services, medical care and Internet access. Our goal during this emergency is to create campuses where students and their families can feel confident that they will be in as safe an environment as we can possibly provide.

Today, we are providing our institutions and agencies with updated guidance regarding campus and business operations, and we will continue to revisit these recommendations as the situation with COVID-19 evolves:

Limits on Public Gatherings:

On March 16th, the White House released additional guidelines for social distancing, to limit gatherings to 10 or fewer people for the next 15 days for all U.S. events, and ensure appropriate social distancing during any such meetings or gatherings. Many local governments are moving to close restaurants and other businesses and to limit the size of public gatherings. In keeping with this new guidance, please limit any and all meetings or gatherings of faculty, students, staff or others to 10 or fewer people through March 31st.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/index.html>

Academic Institutions:

Campus Operations: In keeping with our overall goal, please continue to keep your campuses and any and all necessary support functions open for students during the suspension of classes and during alternative delivery of classes as long as national circumstances with this pandemic make that possible. All campus operations necessary to sustain alternative course delivery methods and support services must meet social distancing parameters, utilize alternative schedules where needed, and be supported remotely where possible. Core support services should remain operational, at the discretion of the CEO or delegated authority. Please continue to exercise prudent judgment in all areas to meet the changing needs of your campus and the community at large.

- We should make it clear to students that they are permitted to return home if that is an option, but students should not be required to leave campus at this time. We believe campus living may actually be the best—or only—option for many students and the preferred option for others. We will meet their needs. The System will support efforts to ensure that everything possible is done to limit the potential spread of COVID-19 on our campuses, including more frequent and extensive cleaning of areas in student use (dorms, computer labs) and other approaches.
- Non-essential faculty and staff are expected to work remotely at the discretion of the campus CEO or delegated authority. It is a local leadership decision as to staffing levels needed to maintain essential operations on each campus.
- Student housing will remain open and food service will continue unless circumstances warrant a change.
- We are evaluating options for students who wish to withdraw from student housing and return home for the semester. Further guidance will follow.
- We ask that you postpone all events with more than 250 people planned before May 31st, including commencement ceremonies. We will revisit this guidance on a regular basis in case such events occurring later in the semester are able to be rescheduled.
- Please require all student organizations on your campus to comply with the limitations on the size of public gatherings, including clubs, fraternities, sororities and any other student groups.

Alternative Course Delivery:

Please continue to work to move to alternative course delivery, across all locations. We are operating under the assumption that we may be using alternative modes of teaching for all students for the remainder of the semester or until the current situation changes and further guidance is provided. Existing online courses may continue as planned, at the university's discretion.

- We acknowledge it may be difficult to eliminate all face-to-face interaction, due to the nature of the class or due to technical or other limitations.
- Until March 31st, all face to face meetings should be limited to 10 or fewer people, in spaces that allow for social distancing, which is six feet, according to CDC guidance.

- If face-to-face class meetings or lab use are unavoidable for particular classes or groups of students after March 31st, please ensure ways to practice social distancing and infection control throughout the use of the space.

Federal Student Work Study Programs / Texas College Work Study Program:

Current Federal and State Work Study financial aid rules are being waived during COVID-19. An institution may allow students to continue work-study related employment to receive these financial aid payments or alternatively release work-study payments to students not able to work due to campus closures and other COVID-19 related impacts. Student workers not employed under state or federal work-study programs are not included in this waiver.

Agencies and System Offices:

Effective immediately, we ask that you plan to extend your remote work staff plans until May 1. If we are able to rescind or revise limited staffing levels prior to May 1, we will do that based on expert guidance from local, state and federal officials. Our hope is that by providing this blanket guidance for a period of certainty, you can focus resources on other challenges rather than reacting to potential changes in business operations on a weekly basis.

Each Vice Chancellor or Agency director may designate staffing levels needed to maintain critical business operations and continuity. This does not apply to TDEM given its emergency management responsibilities, or to certain divisions of Agrilife, TEEX, TFS, and TVMDL, as determined by agency leadership.

Research:

Research laboratories and facilities are expected to continue operations, under the guidance being provided. Researchers are advised to consider ways to scale back or delay research projects in the event it becomes necessary to further reduce or even halt laboratory research operations. Individual labs need to carefully evaluate how to reduce staffing and to allow students, post-docs, and other lab staff to work remotely as much as possible. Social distancing and other public health measures should be practiced at all times. TAMU provides additional guidance: <https://vpr.tamu.edu/covid-19>

Remote Work and Emergency Leave:

All System Members are strongly encouraged to implement temporary alternate work location arrangements (remote work) in accordance with System Regulation [33.06.01](#) for all employees when possible. This may involve work that is outside the employee's primary responsibilities.

If remote work is not possible for employees otherwise able to work but are not able to report to their normal work location, emergency leave is then recommended in accordance System Regulation [31.03.03](#), section 2.5.2. This may include employees who are unable to report to their normal work location because of the need to care for dependent children where schools or daycare facilities have closed.

The system member CEO or designee has authority to approve such leave. Any member authorizing emergency leave should ensure that it complies with the reporting requirements found in Tex. Gov't Code sec. 661.902(d).

<https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/GV/htm/GV.661.htm#661.902>

Travel and Other Guidance:

- No international travel is permitted through May 31st, unless it is directly critical to the ongoing international efforts to deal with Coronavirus; this date will be revisited and may be extended.
- No domestic air travel is permitted unless deemed mission critical, through May 31st; this date will be revisited and may be extended.
- All travel should be approved by the university administration before it occurs.
- In addition, we discourage travel between System campuses and locations unless mission critical.

Domestic Travel Guidance:

- Domestic travelers are required only to self-monitor at this time.
- Domestic travelers do NOT need to self-isolate unless feeling ill or in a household with someone ill.
- Guidance for self-monitoring is found here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>

International Travel Guidance:

- Given ongoing developments in COVID-19 transmission in recent days, any faculty, staff or students returning from international travel from any country (including cruises) and through any U.S. airport must self-isolate for 14 days before returning to a System campus or work location. This policy is effective immediately.
- International travelers clearing customs on or after March 14 at the following 13 airports must self-isolate for 14 days before returning to campus: Boston (BOS), Miami (MIA), New York City (JFK), Chicago (ORD), San Francisco (SFO), Seattle (SEA), Los Angeles (LAX), Atlanta (ATL), Honolulu (HNL), Newark (EWR), Dallas (DFW), Detroit (DTW) or Washington-Dulles (IAD) international airports should consider themselves as having returned from a Level 3 COVID-19 location and self-isolate for 14 days after their arrival before returning to campus or their work location. This is consistent with our earlier guidance.
- Guidance for self-isolating is found here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>

In addition, CDC now recommends that travelers defer all cruise travel worldwide. Cruise travelers should stay home for 14 days after returning from travel, monitor their health, and practice social distancing.

Please continue to check the CDC website as travel recommendations may evolve:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

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Please continue to follow all guidance from local authorities, state government, the CDC and the White House Coronavirus Task Force regarding all aspects of the response to this pandemic.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/index.html>

https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20_coronavirus-guidance_8.5x11_315PM.pdf

Please let me or Billy Hamilton know if your institution or agency is facing any insurmountable issues or unresolved problems at this time. It is our goal for the A&M System to continue to function as effectively as possible even during this unprecedented time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Sharp". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left and then loops back under the name.

John Sharp
Chancellor