



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

SIU System Faculty and Staff:

I first want to thank all of you for your continued, outstanding work serving our students and communities under challenging circumstances. I remain impressed by the many ways faculty, staff and students across the system are reaching out across the state to help address critical needs, while also focusing on their teaching, research and studies.

I look forward to a time when I can thank you in person for your dedication. Unfortunately, it is still not clear when that time might come. While we learned yesterday that the Governor's stay-at-home order was extended through the end of the May, we still face many questions about the future.

We have already made decisions to move summer classes online or to alternative formats (all summer for Carbondale and through at least June for Edwardsville) and are canceling most summer events. Our next major decisions relate to the fall semester. Given the uncertainties around COVID-19 and future guidance from state executive branch and legislative leaders as well as health agencies, we need to start planning for multiple scenarios, each of which will impact how we deliver courses, maintain operations, house students and host events. We know from our recent experiences in the face of this pandemic that there are many, many complex issues to consider. Although all of higher education was faced with addressing these issues this spring very quickly, sometimes in days and even hours, we now have an opportunity to spend a little more time planning for all of the possibilities we may face in the fall.

To help us move forward with our plan, I will be appointing a system-wide task force to identify and explore all options for the fall semester. They will build off of the internal conversations already being led by the chancellors on our campuses. For many important reasons, our goal will be to operate as close to normal as possible while following the guidelines and directives set forth by the governor and health officials. Even as we plan for business-not-quite-as-usual, we will need to have back-up plans so we can change course quickly based on the guidance we receive.

The task force will move forward as quickly and strategically as possible. Meanwhile, our message to students and others is that we will open for the fall semester regardless of how we operate.

The framework for the fall semester is just one important topic being discussed on campuses across the country. You may be reading that some institutions are announcing furloughs, layoffs and other cuts to address the financial impact of COVID-19. A few of you have asked about the impact of the pandemic on our own budget and what that could mean for employees.

First, it is important to remember that every institution is in a different position (e.g., some states have already announced significant budget decreases for FY 2020 and/or FY 2021, and some institutions rely heavily on endowment earnings that have fallen dramatically in the last two months). Even within our own system, the School of Medicine might need to take a different approach from the rest of the Carbondale campus because of its reliance on clinical operations for funding. Overall, the largest question facing SIU is what the budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 will look like, which will obviously be impacted by enrollment and state appropriations. We know this crisis will hit the state budget hard. We also know that higher education remains a priority to our elected officials.

While it is too early to project what our appropriation might be, and enrollment even in a normal year is hard to accurately predict, we have a responsibility to be prepared. To that end, we are working through several budget models that take into account both state funding and enrollment. We will continue to adapt our models – which range in levels of impact – as we get new information. As we have made budget decisions this spring, we will continue to make budget decisions with the recognition that our core mission is to educate students and support them as they pursue their educational goals, and that our faculty and staff play the key role in providing this educational experience.

While we do not know enough today to offer a concrete answer about what the future holds for our budget in this constantly changing situation, I am asking everyone to be conservative in spending, manage budgets carefully, and think strategically about needs and priorities before filling positions. Any funds we conserve today can minimize the impact of a potential cut in the future.

Meanwhile, we will continue to work with the governor's office and legislators to reinforce the importance of higher education, seek as much financial relief as possible through federal and state COVID-19 grants, and remain dedicated to attracting new students to SIU.

In closing, I want to thank the leaders of the SIU campuses for coming together to work through shared challenges. We have had system meetings almost every day since the beginning of the crisis and this has been helpful in all of our decision making. As a system, we are strongest when we work together, and I am seeing that in action every day.

Again, I appreciate all of your work, collaboration and compassion. I will keep you posted as we move forward.

Sincerely,
Dan Mahony
President, SIU System