



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Dear SIU System Colleagues:

As we wrap up spring semester, I thank you once again for all you have done to fulfill our educational mission in very challenging circumstances. As a system, we have continued to serve our students, our communities and our patients even as we have maneuvered through the uncertainties of the pandemic. I am very proud of all you have accomplished during these unprecedented times.

I write with an update about the fall 2020 semester. In an earlier message, I indicated that our goal will be to operate as normally as possible, while remaining committed to the health and safety of our university and local communities. In order to do so, we will continue to follow the guidelines and directives set forth by the governor and health officials. Our goal has not changed, but we now have additional information from the governor's office and our own system-wide task force to provide a framework for fall planning.

As you may know, Governor Pritzker has introduced "[Restore Illinois: A Public Health Approach to Safely Reopen Our State](#)." The plan breaks down the state's reopening into five phases and outlines criteria for advancing to each phase, including metrics related to number of cases, hospital capacity, testing and tracing. The plan also divides the state into zones, allowing for different parts of the state to move through phases at different times. Both Edwardsville and Carbondale are in the Southern Illinois region, while most of our medical education program is offered at the School of Medicine in the Central Illinois region.

Based on our internal discussions, which are informed by expertise from faculty in our School of Medicine, we are optimistic that our regions of the state will reach phase four of the governor's plan by August. Phase four allows schools and universities to provide on-the-ground education with approved safety guidance.

Reaching phase four, the "revitalization" phase, will require continued, widespread diligence regarding social distancing and other directives to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Even when we reach stage four and offer in-person classes, we must continue to follow recommendations regarding social distancing, minimizing density of events and other safety measures.

With the Restore Illinois plan in mind, the system task force is identifying and discussing key issues the campuses must address as they plan for face-to-face classes in the fall. Because the campuses are different, we are not assuming that every issue will be addressed in the same way. We are, however, sharing proposed solutions, exploring when it makes sense to collaborate, and developing shared principles related to safety measures and other factors. Here are some examples of topics under discussion:

- **Options for delivering face-to-face classes:** This may include offering modified courses that mix delivery methods or changing the schedule by offering shorter course blocks, more sections, adjusting the calendar, etc. As noted before, one size will not fit all given the nature of each course and each campus. Each campus will be developing its own guidelines to help faculty move forward with course planning.
- **Classroom space:** Campuses are analyzing classroom space and assignments to accommodate social distancing. They are also working to identify alternative spaces for classes, such as large ballrooms or auditoriums.
- **Protective measures:** Reusable masks will be provided to students, faculty and staff; cleaning protocols will be enhanced; social distancing will be enforced and more.
- **Testing and tracking:** The ability to test widely and trace contacts is critically important. Campuses are discussing possibilities internally and with their local health departments.
- **Residence halls:** Move-in may be staggered and assignments and dining practices will be reviewed to support social distancing. Campuses are also looking at options for isolating students who are ill.
- **High-risk faculty, staff and students:** The campuses are exploring processes for accommodating high risk employees and students.
- **Educating our students:** We are looking at ways to help both on-campus and off-campus students understand their responsibilities to protect their own health and the health of others, including those who are at higher risk.
- **Events:** The governor's plan currently allows for gatherings of up to 50 people in phase four. The campuses are discussing what this means for typical fall events like homecoming. We will also be involved in discussions regarding athletics with the NCAA and our respective conferences.

There are many more conversations taking place at both the campus and system levels. My intent in sharing these examples is to assure you that we are carefully examining all aspects of campus life to ensure that we are ready to offer in-person classes in the fall safely and effectively.

Our goal is to have plans in place by mid-June in order to give everyone a clear sense of our direction and options for adjusting activities for the fall 2020 semester. Of course, we know that much depends upon the course of the virus and the directives of health care and government officials. We also know that even as we move forward through the phases outlined in the Restore Illinois plan, there is also a possibility of moving backward. We will need to be flexible, but move forward intentionally.

Again, our goal is to have students back on campus and to offer face-to-face, on-the-ground education this fall, and we are optimistic that we will be able to do so.

Sincerely

Dan Mahony
President, SIU System