

## **Academic Affairs Update - 2020 Fall Semester (July 31<sup>st</sup>)**

In mid-July, you received an email from the Academic Affairs Fall Semester Planning Team with information about the 2020 fall semester. Much of that information pertained to changes in the teaching domain that have occurred as a result of COVID-19 and guidance from the CDC, Health Agencies, and the Governor's office. Since that time, additional guidance has been provided and the campus has continued to transform so that our faculty can safely deliver courses and students can safely attend those courses. Classrooms have been significantly modified, new classrooms have been created in spaces not previously used for instruction, video/audio recording equipment has been installed in the classrooms on a scale not imagined before, a facial covering/mask expectation has been established for the campus, current policies have been modified, and new procedures have been created.

Before launching into descriptions of those changes, let me first say that I hope you are doing as well as possible and that you/those close to you have been able to remain safe and healthy over the last 4-5 months. Please continue to be diligent in fighting this virus. Wear your mask/face covering, wash your hands frequently, social distance, and don't congregate in large groups.

### **Academic Affairs Actions Since July 15<sup>th</sup>**

I suspect that a primary concern to you right now is how will MSU manage a positive COVID-19 case, should it arise on our campus. Extensive protocols have been developed and will be shared in a separate communication to employees, but should a positive case arise (student or employee), immediate actions will include:

- The positive COVID-19 person will be isolated for at least 14 days.
- Affected classrooms, offices, spaces will be locked and made inaccessible except to personnel who will be sanitizing the space. These spaces will remain untouched for 72 hours and will be sanitized.
- Impacted and potentially impacted faculty, staff, employees, and students will be notified, including faculty teaching courses scheduled in the affected classroom.
- Contact tracing will begin, with direct contacts notified and required to quarantine for 14 days.
- Numerous other actions will be initiated to isolate the incident and ensure the safety of our employees and students.

### **Classroom Modifications**

- More than 200 classrooms on the campus have been adapted to social/physical distancing guidelines, including:
  - Significant reductions in the number of seats in classrooms, with very few classrooms in academic buildings having seating capacities greater than 25
  - Several classrooms rendered unusable due to very limited number of physically-distanced seats/desks

- Chairs, desks, tables removed from several classrooms
- Seats marked as “Do Not Sit” or entire rows of seats taped off to prevent usage

### New Classroom Spaces

- To create more classroom spaces on our campus capable of seating 25 students or more:
  - ADUC Ballroom converted to classrooms (Ballrooms A, B, and C) and dedicated to Academic Affairs use
  - Other larger spaces in ADUC converted to classroom layout and dedicated to Academic Affairs use
  - Button Auditorium used as classroom
  - Button Drill Room converted to classroom layout and dedicated to Academic Affairs use
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Street Eats space converted to classroom layout
  - Note that instructions for operating video/audio equipment in these rooms will be provided to faculty/teaching staff

### Classroom Technology Modifications

- More than 100 classrooms will have been equipped with video recording technology to permit WebEx streaming/recording of lectures in support of hybrid/hyflex course delivery
- Note that instructions will be placed in each classroom for using the technology and enabling streaming/recording

### MSU’s Face Coverings/Mask Requirements & Compliance with this Requirement

- As has been communicated, faculty, staff, and students are required to wear face coverings/masks in all buildings and instructional spaces unless medical reasons preclude
- For faculty concerned about student’s ability to read their lips when wearing face coverings, clear masks are available - please contact your department chair/associate dean to make a request for this type of mask
- Should a student attempt to attend an in-person class session without properly wearing a face covering/mask, a process has been developed to address non-compliance of MSU’s face covering/mask requirement (see below). This process has been designed to avoid faculty and student confrontations, instead engaging Department Chairs/Associate Deans (and ultimately the Dean of Students) to address this issue.

#### ***MSU Student Face Coverings Compliance Procedure***

*Should a student attend a face-to-face class without properly wearing a mask/face covering, the faculty member should avoid confrontation by informing the student that there is an expectation that all students must comply with the MSU policy of wearing a mask/face covering in instructional spaces. Faculty should state that this expectation was communicated to students before the semester began and is included in the course syllabus. If the student cannot provide the faculty member with university documentation of a face covering accommodation and either does not have a mask or will not wear one properly, then the faculty member will ask the student to*

leave the classroom and return only if a face covering is properly worn. The faculty member will inform the student that free face masks are available in the nearest Department/School office, a nearby location that has communicated to the instructor, or the Dean's office, and identify that location. The faculty member will also inform the student that failure to return to the same class session wearing a face covering properly will result in an unexcused absence for that class period, and that any work missed during the time spent retrieving a mask is unexcused. If the student returns wearing a face covering properly, then no record of the incident is necessary. - Should a student provide the faculty member with university documentation of a face covering accommodation, the student is not required to wear a face covering. Faculty may not identify any student possessing mask/ face-covering accommodations as that information is confidential. If other students inquire as to why students with face covering accommodations are not wearing face coverings, then faculty should reply that university face covering policies are being followed in the class.

If the student refuses to leave the classroom, the faculty member should not confront the student, but instead should contact the Department Chair/Associate Dean immediately and strongly consider ending the class session for the safety of everyone involved, providing an alternative approach to instruction for the other students (such as a Blackboard assignment, online instruction, etc.). The Chair/Associate Dean will document the student's name, ID number, and the date/class/instructor involved, contact the student (either immediately or by email), remind the student about the university's requirements concerning face coverings, determine whether this is the student's first offense, and create a record of the incident.

If this is the student's first offense, then the Department Chair/Associate Dean or Dean will also inform the student that the next offense will result in a referral to the Dean of Students for possible violation of MSU's Student Code of Conduct, which could result in suspension or expulsion from the university. If the incident is not the student's first offense, then the Department Chair/Associate Dean will document the student's name, ID number, and the date/class/instructor involved, contact the student (either immediately or by email), remind the student about the university's requirements concerning masks/face coverings, and notify the student that a referral has been made to the Dean of Students and College Dean for a possible violation of the Student Code of Conduct. The Dean of Students will promptly investigate any student with at least two violations of the university's requirements concerning masks/face coverings and take appropriate action.

### Changes to Student Excused Absences Policy

- As noted in an email sent from the Provost's office and included in the MSU Syllabus Checklist document, temporary guidance for student excused absences due to illness is as follows:

*Typical policies that govern excused student absences in courses for student illness (i.e., UAR 131) are relaxed for this term. Guidance from health departments and the CDC require anyone testing positive for COVID-19 to self-isolate and monitor symptoms. This guidance also requires anyone who has been exposed to COVID-19 to quarantine, monitor symptoms, and seek medical attention. Further, this guidance recommends that anyone experiencing COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, tiredness, difficulty breathing, etc.) stay home, monitor symptoms, and seek medical attention.*

*Students testing positive for COVID-19, those who have been exposed to COVID-19, and those experiencing COVID-19 symptoms must also contact their instructor(s) as soon as possible unless incapable due to illness. Student absences due to COVID-19 illness, exposure, or symptoms, with or without documentation, should be excused and students given a flexible timeline for production, make-up, and/or delivery of missed assignments. After reviewing the specific circumstance for student absence, the instructor and student will discuss makeup of missed assignments and mutually agreed upon deadlines. In the case of illness/medical emergencies, if a period of extended absences is necessary (more than 15% of total class instructional time) the student should contact the Office of the Assistant Vice President/Dean of Students as soon as possible (but no later than two weeks after the period of absence). In these circumstances, documentation may be required and an institutional excuse may be provided to all of the student's instructors.*

### Contact Tracing - Attendance Tracking by Faculty

- Should there be a positive COVID-19 student case, contact tracing personnel will develop a list of all who have been in direct contact with the student and contact those individuals as soon as possible.
- To permit contract tracing personnel to be provided with timely and accurate information, faculty will be required to track attendance in each of their in-person class meetings, as described below.

### ***Contact Tracing/Attendance Tracking***

*During the 2020-21 academic year our faculty must play a critical role in the fight against COVID-19 by engaging in rigorous tracking of student class attendance for in-person class sessions. In an effort to support potential contact tracing efforts, course instructors are required to record student attendance during each in-person class session using procedures that fit best for their type of instruction. An instructor needs to be prepared to report who was present and absent during any given class session; however, aside from the usual reporting that is done in the first 10 days of the semester for federal financial aid purposes, this information will only be requested by department chairs or associate deans if needed for a COVID-19 situation.*

*When taking attendance, care should be used to comply with current safety guidelines, including social distancing. For example, students should not be asked to gather around a form to sign in, and students should not share writing utensils that have been touched by others. Although many options are available, some choices include:*

- *Use of attendance tool in Self-Service to note student's presence or absence*
- *Use of a seating chart to record attendance for each student*
- *Electronic tools that allow students to report attendance using electronic devices (e.g., through polling applications, etc.) or iClickers*
- *Students submit a quiz, assignment, or piece of paper with their name written on it (preferably contactless, such as submitting it to a plastic bag that can be sealed)*
- *Calling roll*

## **Reminders of Academic Affairs Actions/Recommendations (from earlier this summer)**

### **Safety & Safety Protocols - Classrooms**

- MSU face covering/mask requirement at entrance to all classrooms
- Classrooms sanitized/cleaned each morning, additional sanitizing (as possible based on classroom schedule) throughout the day
- Hand sanitizer available in all classrooms
- Sanitizing wipes available in all classrooms - faculty encouraged to clean instructor stations and students encouraged to clean desks/chairs/tables as they enter the classroom

### **Safety & Safety Protocols - Buildings**

- MSU face covering/mask requirement at entrances
- Hand sanitizer stations at entrances

- Signs in multiple locations in buildings indicating social distancing, hand washing, and face covering protocols
- Signage indicating one-way entrance and exits (where possible)
- One-way (up/down) indicators in stairwells (where possible)
- Traffic flow indicators on floors in hallways
- Social distancing/capacity signage at bathroom and elevator doors

### 2020 Fall Semester and Winter Term Calendars

- Fall semester begins August 17, ends November 24; fall break eliminated
- Winter term - two winter terms this year
  - Traditional 4-week Winter Term that begins December 14, ends January 8 (online instruction only)
  - New Winter II Term
    - Begins December 3, ends January 8
    - Primarily online instruction, but faculty can utilize the week of January 4-8 for face-to-face instruction, in-class learning activities, labs, studios, etc. and create a hybrid instruction model in their courses

### Fall Semester Course Delivery Modes

- Traditional face-to-face instruction, hybrid/hyflex instruction (F2F and online instruction; minimum of 50% F2F), fully online
- Approximate percentages of modalities (based on # of course sections): 30% online, 10% hybrid, 55% F2F, 4% ITV/regional campuses

### Faculty Online Teaching Training/Workshops

- A total of six online teaching workshops were offered this summer. Many thanks to David Flora, Xavier Scott, Jing Zhang, and Laurie Couch for leading these workshops and providing needed and high quality information.

### Reminders

- As noted in a communication from President Morgan, Governor Beshear's Executive Order restriction of no more than 10-person gatherings does not apply to academic settings (e.g., classrooms, labs, etc.)
- Please continue to be prepared to pivot to online instruction in their in-person/hybrid courses should COVID-19 situations necessitate
- Please communicate with students before the beginning of the fall term, especially if the delivery mode of your course(s) has changed
- Please discourage students from moving desks/chairs/tables in classrooms as social distancing guidelines have been applied in placing these in the classrooms

- Please encourage students to follow social distancing guidelines when exiting a class meeting, maintaining 6 feet of distance between each student
- Please be more patient than normal with students who are tardy to class, especially early in the semester, due to the following:
  - Elevator capacity restrictions (due to COVID-19 guidelines) will restrict the number of students permitted on elevators
  - Students maintaining social distancing will require additional time when exiting class meetings
  - Students maintaining social distancing in academic building hallways may require more time to navigate spaces
  - One-directional stairs (up/down) in academic buildings may cause delays
  - One-way entrance/exits in academic buildings may cause delays
  - Students being less familiar with layout of non-traditional classroom spaces (ADUC, Button) may cause delays
- Please understand that it will be important for faculty to dismiss class sessions on-time so that students can navigate the delays described above
- MSU's new SGA President requested that faculty contact students prior to the beginning of the fall semester to make them aware of what the 1<sup>st</sup> day of in-person classes will look like this fall (social distancing seating in classrooms, one-way building entrances/exits, one-direction stairs, traffic flow indicators in hallways, etc.). Please consider placing an Announcement on your Blackboard course shell to address this request.

While academic affairs leadership has attempted to consider various aspects of offering in-person and hybrid courses in a safe manner during a pandemic, undoubtedly there will be situations for which we have not accounted. Please do not hesitate to let me, the Deans, or your Department Chair/Associate Deans know if something has been overlooked or if you need assistance.

Thanks for all that you have done and will continue to do over the next two weeks in preparing for the fall term. Our students are looking forward to returning to the MSU campus, seeing the faculty again, and experiencing the high-quality instruction you provide.

I will send an additional Academic Affairs update as we approach August 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 2020 fall semester.

Greg

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