

TO: Faculty Senate

FROM: Jeff Gingerich, Ph.D.  
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

DATE: September 13, 2020

SUBJECT: Academic Affairs Report for September 18, 2020

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## **COVID Update**

As you might imagine, much of our time in the Provost's Office this semester is spent responding to the COVID-19 virus and working with faculty, deans, Student Life and all others across campus to continue our academic enterprise while keeping safety and health as our top priority. As announced this past Friday and due to the increasing number of students in quarantine and isolation, a two-week period of remote instruction will start this Wednesday, September 16. Limiting the movement of students on campus decreases possible transmission of the virus. Students now in isolation and quarantine will be able to return to campus with their peers when in-person instruction resumes.

I want to provide some further explanation about the rationale for this decision:

- We have been advised by outside experts not to wait until positive cases are unmanageable to do a two-week pivot to remote. If we wait too long, then we have lost our opportunity to control the virus through restrictions and limiting interactions. If we want to try to conclude our semester in person, we need to take this time to do what we can to try to minimize the spread so that we can regroup in two weeks.
- The data through our contact tracing is not showing that exposure in the classroom has been a significant factor in the spread of the virus, but the interactions that occur going to and from the classrooms as well as within the classrooms are additional interactions that can be minimized for a two-week period. The idea behind the 2-week hiatus is to minimize as many interactions as possible to reduce exposure, which should reduce the number of positive cases, isolations and quarantines so that we can return to face-to-face classes.
- The data that we were receiving from the beginning of the week was showing a continual upward trend in the number of positive cases, which meant that the number of quarantined students was going to rise substantially as well. We were already seeing faculty and students having to balance some students in class and other students remote, and this was going to increase this week because of the additional quarantines. The two-week pivot to remote learning allows us to maintain more consistency during those two weeks with the hope of reducing the number of students quarantined and isolated when we return.
- We did decide to keep students on campus for a few reasons:
  - NIAID Director Anthony Fauci and others are strongly urging universities to keep their students on campus and, when possible, not to send them home for overall public health and safety

- If students were to return home and then come back in two weeks, we would have a lot less control and knowledge of their behavior during that time period.
- If students were to return home, it would be very hard to get everyone to return. So this is an attempt to minimize for a short time so that we can actually finish out the semester with face to face classes.
- Of course this relies on our ability to minimize the number of physical interactions (and exposure) on and off campus during the two weeks. I acknowledge that this is not an easy task, but I do have confidence in our student life and residence life staff that they will be doing everything that they can to try to make a difference during these two weeks. This includes off-campus behavior. It is clear that the sanctions that were applied to students (both off and on-campus) who did not follow rules during the first week of the semester have had an impact on other student behavior (students understand that there can be severe consequences for not following the rules). And, for the reasons noted above, this was a better option than giving up for the semester since many faculty and students want to finish out the semester in the same way we started.

### **Next Steps for the two-week pivot to remote learning:**

As announced in the Royals Safe Together update:

- Classes will meet in person on Monday and Tuesday (September 14-15).
- On Wednesday, September 16, in-person classes will shift to remote education.
- We will return to in-person classes (or mode of teaching established at the beginning of the semester) on Wednesday, September 30.
- Select laboratory courses will be permitted to continue meeting in person at the direction of the appropriate dean in consultation with the department chair. Only courses with (L) designation will be considered.
- Access for individual research laboratory work can continue. We ask faculty and students to follow the current Royals Safe Together procedures for labs.
- Faculty will continue to have access to individual offices and may continue to teach remotely from your scheduled classroom if you prefer.
- The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) and Information Technology (IT) staff are available to help with transitions to remote learning. We encourage including as much interactive (Zoom) classwork as possible as students have expressed their appreciation for this interaction when learning remotely. The Provost's office will send additional information to faculty for successful remote learning.
  - You can contact the CTLE by email at [ctle@scranton.edu](mailto:ctle@scranton.edu).
  - Exams administered through online platforms must comply with the time extensions for each individual student's accommodation needs. [Click here for steps on how to configure Special Access in D2L](#). Students with accommodations through the CTLE can continue to take their tests in the CTLE during this period.

- IT support is available by phone at 570-941-4357 or by e-mail at [techsupport@scranton.edu](mailto:techsupport@scranton.edu), or you can enter a ticket in Royal IT Support via the My Scranton portal.
- The Weinberg Memorial Library will hold limited hours with both building and staffing. The new hours are Monday-Thursday 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Saturday & Sunday Noon to 7 p.m. Access is by swipe only to members of the University community (no public patrons). The Circulation Desk will remain open, but access to some areas/services will be limited. No after-hours swipe access will be allowed.

I continue to be grateful to all faculty, whether you began the semester teaching in-person, remote or in a hybrid combination. Your commitment to our students has been extraordinary.

### **Responding to Systemic Racism and Supporting Anti-racism initiatives**

While much of all our time has indeed been spent responding to the unusual semester due to the virus, we have continued to be insistent about the urgent need to ensure that our university community confronts the historical legacy of racism within our own institution. A number of important discussions and initiatives have taken place over the summer and in the first few weeks of the semester:

- Last week, many of our faculty and students participated in a Teach-in for Racial Justice as part of the national #ScholarStrike movement. #ScholarStrike was an effort arising from a number of concerned university teachers and scholars who called for a national academic event organized in protest of racial injustice and in solidarity with the Black community. At The University of Scranton, the event was sponsored through the Ellacuría Initiative, which sought to provide a communal space that students, faculty, and staff could enter to learn from scholars with expertise in research areas that affect the Black community and discuss with our campus community the issues these talks address.

Many of you participated in these sessions on campus:

- 1048 students were in attendance over 13 sessions in two days
- 11 faculty members led discussions
- 25 faculty attended (many more than one session)
- 12 FYS sections attended during their class times

I want to particularly thank Dr. Teresa Grettano for her leadership of these important discussions on campus and for providing us with a helpful summary of what was learned during these two days.

- The Council on Diversity and Inclusion has submitted recommendations to Fr. Pilarz and the President's Cabinet based on their analysis of what can and should be done for the University of Scranton to dismantle systemic racism at the university. President's Cabinet has already started reviewing these recommendations and is committed to responding to the Council by September 30<sup>th</sup> as requested by the Council. I am grateful to all of the members of the Council who put considerable thought and energy into this important discussion.

- I have established a working group to examine our practices for faculty hiring that will focus on how we are diversifying our faculty through better hiring practices with a specific focus on racial and ethnic diversity. The group has already met three times and has begun to strategize effective ways to deepen and grow the racial and ethnic diversity of our faculty by considering such matters as:
  - How we strengthen the diversity of our candidate pools
  - How we structure our positions for greater diversity
  - How and where we advertise for faculty
  - How to assist search committees/departments to review candidate pools, interview and host candidates, and make recommendations in ways that support diversity
  - How the University supports hiring for diversity and discourages bias and other obstacles to hiring for diversity
  - How the University supports and retains faculty of color
  - Other important concerns for hiring for diversity

I am grateful to members of the group: George Aulisio, Lori Bruch, Christie Karpiak, Nabil Tamimi, Michelle Maldonado, Liz Garcia and Patti Tetreault.

I know that there are many other important initiatives and discussions happening on campus and am grateful for the many voices that have emerged in support of these efforts. Fr. Pilarz detailed many of these in his August 28<sup>th</sup> email to campus. While these are not easy or comfortable conversations, it is imperative that our campus community confronts our history of racism and works toward a university that is welcoming and inclusive of everyone.

### **President's Search Committee**

The Board of Trustees has hired the services of WittKieffer Executive Search, a nationally recognized firm that specializes in executive recruitment for colleges and universities. While a search committee is being finalized, finding the best candidate depends on the input of the entire Scranton community. To assist in establishing candidate criteria, search consultants have scheduled open forums with faculty, staff, and students to get a sense of the University's core values, characteristic, strengths, priorities, and opportunities. A survey was also sent to the University community to gather additional input.

Committed to overseeing a process that is as comprehensive, inclusive, and transparent as possible the Board launched a [presidential search website](#) where you will find up-to-date information about the search.

### **Rank and Tenure**

A virtual public meeting to inform faculty of the rank and tenure policies and procedures will be held on Thursday, September 17<sup>th</sup> at 11:45 a.m.

Due to safety concerns surrounding the coronavirus, FAC and the FPC have agreed to changes to the rank and tenure procedures, as defined in Section 23 of the *Faculty Handbook*, for candidates applying during the 2020-2021 Academic Year. This will include an online process for submission and review of rank and tenure materials. We are working closely with FAC to

establish a clear and confidential process for this review and will provide specific instructions for everyone involved.

### **Curriculum Update**

The following curriculum proposals have been approved.

#### **Program Change**

Entrepreneurship Major  
Entrepreneurship Track

#### **Date Posted**

8/13//20  
4/29/20

#### **Course Change**

HPRO 413: Worksite Health Promotion  
HPRO 480: Internship Health Education

4/30/20  
4/30/20

#### **New Courses**

ENTR 470: Hooking the Sharks  
ENTR 481: Global Practicum

4/14/20  
4/14/20