



MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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To: Montana Board of Regents; Montana University System Chief Executive Officers;
Montana Community College Presidents; Governor Steve Bullock

From: Clayton T. Christian, Commissioner of Higher Education

Date: April 22, 2020

Subject: **COVID-19 UPDATE**

In partnership with the Board of Regents, in ongoing communication and collaboration with statewide authorities, and as Commissioner of Higher Education for the Montana University System, we have continued to monitor the evolving COVID-19 pandemic with the health and safety of our campus communities as my top priority. As we develop a clearer sense of the health challenge we face from the COVID-19 virus, it is also important to maintain a practical, forward-looking approach toward the safety, staffing, and instructional protocols that will guide us for the rest of spring semester and into summer. With that in mind, I write today with updated guidance for our MUS campuses, effective immediately:

- 1. Campus staffing models should carefully and strategically shift from the “limited core-services” approach of the past month toward something that resembles a “new normal” approach for this time of year.** Staffing strategies need not be the same as those that pre-dated the COVID-19 crisis, but campuses should gravitate toward an approach that moves employees back to on-campus work, with consideration of staggered scheduling, exceptions for work situations in which social distancing is impossible to achieve with full staffing, and/or individual cases in which vulnerable employees have worked with supervisors to establish work-from-home approaches. As campuses develop their on-campus staffing strategy, they should align with other key aspects of Governor Bullock’s April 22 directive, including but not limited to:
 - Encouraging employees to conduct self-health awareness checks before going to work.
 - Requiring employees experiencing any symptoms to stay home from or leave work.
 - Closing common areas where employees congregate or interact closely.
 - Disinfecting common and high-traffic areas.
 - Minimizing non-essential business travel.
- 2. Remote delivery of instruction will continue throughout the rest of the spring semester.** Exceptions include required in-person instruction for certain CTE courses and clinical experiences. All instances of in-person instruction will continue to adhere to proper social distancing and cleaning policies.
- 3. As conditions allow, summer term coursework and student services may be offered in-person.** Some coursework and some non-essential student services may be reintroduced to campus provided they function in accordance with social distancing measures and guidance developed by federal and state public health authorities. Through work on campuses and the MUS Healthy Fall 2020 Task Force, we will continue to develop plans for in-person instruction and on-campus student life to fully resume for the fall semester.

4. **MUS campuses will continue to protect the health of our students and employees.** All learning, instruction, and work on campus will occur in accordance with appropriate social distancing measures and guidance developed by federal and state public health authorities. Until further notice, campuses should extend current directives on residence hall life, student dining services, and large in-person gatherings.

I have mentioned in my earlier communications that the COVID-19 challenge is fluid. That certainly remains the case today, and it will likely be the case for at least the 2020-2021 Academic Year. It is our responsibility to adapt our policies to new constraints and new opportunities. This will always be done with health and safety as the basis for our thinking, and in consultation with public health authorities, Governor Bullock, and other statewide partners. This week, our office will also organize the first meeting of the MUS 'Healthy Fall 2020' Task Force, which will convene campus leaders from across the System to begin thinking about how, conditions allowing, we can safely, effectively, and fully return to campus-based instruction and student life for the fall semester.

The climb in front of us is a steep one, but the dedication, resilience, and patience shown by our entire Montana University System during these past difficult weeks gives me great confidence in our ability to overcome the myriad challenges presented by the COVID-19 virus. Indeed, I believe that we will build a "new normal" for our campuses that in many ways enhances the quality of our service to students, employees, and the State of Montana.



Clayton T. Christian
Commissioner of Higher Education