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STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM COVID-19: April 23, 2020 Update #SUSDoingOurPart

Board Members:

The COVID-19 virus pandemic continues to carve a jagged path across the globe, providing few clues for its trackers to follow. There are countries with a rather clear decline in cases, but areas within those countries with continued spread of the virus. This current situation holds true for each of the 50 states across America. Moving forward, the challenge for government leaders is to follow a fact-based strategy that will maintain public health while allowing businesses and communities to re-open safely.

Governor DeSantis has established a statewide “Task Force to Re-Open Florida” to recommend the most prudent way to safely re-open Florida’s economy. As Board Chair, I am honored to serve as a member of the task force’s Executive Committee. Fellow Board member Eric Silagy, who is Chair of the Board’s Task Force on Academic and Workforce Alignment, is also a member of the Executive Committee. The task force, as well as working groups organized by industry, has been meeting each day this week and will make recommendations to the Governor on how to safely re-open the state.

As of today, here are the latest data on the COVID-19 virus:

- 2,650,000+ COVID-19 cases and nearly 185,000 deaths globally (212 countries) – *World Health Organization*.
- 843,000 cases and 47,000 deaths in the U.S. (all 50 states) – *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*.
- 28,576 Florida cases (all 67 counties) [*a 27% increase since last week*]. 27,791 Florida residents and 785 non-Florida residents. 927 deaths have now been reported in Florida [*a 51% increase since last week*]. – *Florida Department of Health*.

State University System

State university boards of trustees, presidents, and academic leaders are actively engaged in making critical decisions to direct their institution’s academic schedule in the coming months and to guide returning and new students on how to move forward with their educational pursuits. In order to adhere to the current social distancing mandates, our state universities will continue to deliver classes via remote instruction for the summer sessions. University boards and presidents have also determined to either

provide a virtual commencement ceremony for their Spring Semester graduates or postpone the ceremony to a later date.

I am continually amazed by the broad range of knowledge and expertise that our universities are providing to support the state's efforts to fight the COVID-19 virus. Here are more examples:

Reaching Out to Florida Communities

- The FAU Schmidt College of Medicine primary care practice program is now offering "virtual visits" (telehealth) with its physicians to the Palm Beach County communities. These virtual visits can be related to preventive care, check-ups, follow-ups or acute illnesses, including supporting patients who are concerned about the COVID-19 virus.
- The FSU Department of Interior Architecture & Design faculty redesigned a local homeless shelter to comply with the CDC social distancing guidelines.
- The FIU Simulation Teaching and Research Center is working with the Florida National Guard doctors, nurses and medics to provide "just in time training" for proper personal protective equipment wear, medical procedures and several other necessary tasks that are specific to the COVID-19 response.
- A UCF direct support organization, Limbitless Solutions, joined a national coalition created by Stratasys to print 3-D components of face shields and other protective equipment for those working in hospitals and other high-risk areas.
- UF Health Shands researchers are utilizing interactive medical simulation to conduct drills with clinicians in the adult and pediatric emergency rooms and intensive care units to prepare for severe cases of the COVID-19 virus.
- The USF Health Office of Clinical Research has launched several clinical trials on the COVID-19 virus, including medications and treatment protocols that could impact the disease at a symptoms-level for patients and at the cellular level of the virus.

Helping the Campus Family

- FAMU is working with the Bond Community Health Center and the FDOH to establish a walk-up COVID-19 testing site on the FAMU campus for the surrounding community.
- FGCU's School Counseling program is offering its services virtually to local school districts offering free, online counseling to students, staff, and families.
- USF Master of Fine Art students worked closely with USF's Contemporary Art Museum to reimagine their thesis exhibition, "Battin' a Hundred," into an online experience of their final projects. Opening night was held virtually through a video conferencing call where artists were able to answer questions about their work.
- Florida Poly student life coordinator staff have developed and posted "At-Home" fitness videos for students called Wellness Wednesday Workouts.

- New College received a \$28,000 grant from Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation for emergency and critical needs relief for students during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- UNF Health Administration faculty have arranged for their students to continue to do required internships in area hospitals online via one-on-one zoom conferences with their hospital mentors.
- The UWF cross country coach is running seven marathons in seven days to raise money for Argo Pantry, which provides food to UWF students in need of assistance, and for Feeding the Gulf Coast, a food bank that serves 24 counties throughout the Florida panhandle, South Alabama and South Mississippi.

Florida

Governor DeSantis and the Florida Department of Health are now focused on two priorities: (1) pushing resources to areas of the state where the COVID-19 virus cases have not lessened, particularly to the state's nursing homes and assisted care facilities (There are currently over 300 long-term facilities in Florida with positive virus cases); and (2) in areas where it is appropriate, determining a safe and orderly process to re-open the state's economy. Over 290,000 COVID-19 tests have now been administered to Floridians, with approximately 10 percent found to be positive cases. Governor DeSantis has continued to expand community-based and walk-up test sites, particularly in Southeast Florida, and has added national guard, mobile testing teams for nursing homes. The Governor is also addressing difficulties in attempts by Floridians to file for unemployment benefits in Florida's Reemployment Assistance program. A new program dashboard has been activated that will be updated daily to reflect the total number of Reemployment Assistance Claims submitted, verified, processed, and paid.

The Governor and Commissioner of Education also announced that all Florida public and private K-12 schools will continue distance learning and keep school campuses closed through June 3rd, the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year.

Nationally, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education will be substantial and possibly staggering. Our state universities have begun to organize campus-wide planning groups or recovery teams to think through how the institution will manage the aftermath of this crisis and get its campus back to a new normal.

Significant challenges will include the following:

- An ongoing battle with the COVID-19 virus, as positive virus cases in campus communities will likely continue to occur. Social distancing policies and other protections for students and employees will become the norm for the foreseeable future.

- Fall semester enrollment reductions are anticipated, as returning students, particularly from at-risk populations, decide to stop/postpone work on their degree and not enroll due to personal financial hardships or other concerns. A critical need will be to stay connected to students with physical or learning disabilities who are vulnerable and have greater academic and personal needs.
- The significant loss of revenue due to possible cancellation or redesign of formal athletic competitions. While the NCAA has modified and lessened eligibility requirements for Spring sports, the Fall season includes the primary revenue producer – football – which provides a majority of annual revenue for athletic departments from television contracts for major conference affiliation. National estimates warn of billions of dollars lost.

The weeks and months ahead will be critical ones but they will present some very real opportunities for the State University System as our universities re-imagine, re-design, and re-open.

Two things are clear to me: Floridians are resilient group and our universities will stay responsive both to their constituents and to the state.

Stay Safe Everyone!



Syd Kitson, Chair

*REMEMBER: Practice Social Distancing! Stay at least 6 feet from others; Stay away from crowded places. **Best Advice: STAY HOME!!***