

Dear University Community,

Before the extended holiday weekend begins, I would like to update you on a number of matters as we continue to navigate the unfolding impacts of this unprecedented time in our history. I again wish to extend my thanks for your continued perseverance in acclimating to our newfound remote academic and work environments. I understand the past few weeks have taken many of us into uncharted territory. The COVID-19 pandemic has dominated all of our agendas and, I know with each turn, we face additional questions. I hope to address some of your questions here and provide details to help inform your decision-making and planning for the coming weeks.

State Funding Restrictions

Many of you are likely aware that last week Missouri Gov. Mike Parson announced \$180 million in state funding restrictions due to significant slowdown in economic growth related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the restrictions made, \$61.3 million was restricted from the state's four-year colleges and universities. This amounts to a \$3.7 million withholding from Southeast's FY20 core appropriation. In the weeks ahead, the University's Executive Staff will be discussing how to replace these funds and the other financial impacts of COVID-19 through the remainder of FY20. We are continuing to evaluate the impact on the University's operation to more fully understand the implications of this restriction and will share additional information in the near future.

Telework

As you know, employees were asked to work remotely through 11:59 p.m. April 19 and to report back to campus on April 20. Since that time, President Trump extended social distancing guidelines through April 30 and Missouri Gov. Parson issued a stay at home order through April 24. Based on these actions, I am extending the telework period for Southeast employees through the close of the spring semester, ending at 11:59 p.m. May 17. Southeast will continue to pay employees at 100% of their salary through this period. Employees are now expected to report back to campus on Monday, May 18, unless communicated otherwise.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)

Employees should also be aware that on March 18, 2020, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) was signed into law by President Trump. Beginning April 1, 2020, and ending December 31, 2020, eligible employees under this Act may be entitled to emergency paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave benefits if certain conditions are met. Due to this new federal emergency paid leave legislation, the University's COVID-19 Leave Guidelines for Employees issued on March 16, 2020, will be discontinued and replaced with the guidance in FFCRA. More information on the FFCRA paid leave benefits is available on the University's COVID-19 webpage at <https://semo.edu/sealerts/covid19/>. Questions concerning these benefits should be directed to Melissia Coffee in Human Resources at mcoffee@semo.edu.

Student Workers

On March 13, 2020, student workers and their supervisors were notified that student workers were not required to report to work during the period between March 16 and April 19, and any scheduled/expected hours that would have been worked during that timeframe would be paid. Last week's announcement by Gov. Parson of one-time withholdings has forced us to review budgetary needs moving forward. Due to growing budgetary challenges and in consideration of our need to extend telework arrangements through May 17, it unfortunately becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the level of funding for student worker positions at this time. Consequently, effective April 20, 2020, all non-work study students, or students not physically working on campus, will not be paid through the end of the semester. Work-study eligible students, however, will continue to be paid for scheduled/expected hours until federal work study (non-University) funds are depleted. Please understand we did not make this decision lightly, as our student workers are a very valuable part of our Southeast employee family. Email communications explaining these processes will be sent to all student workers and their supervisors. The Office of Student Financial Services is available to assist students who have financial challenges addressing any account balances and can be reached at sfs@semo.edu. The Office of Career Services is available to help students connect with part-time employment opportunities. Any student who is in need of assistance should email careerservices@semo.edu to schedule a phone, email, or Zoom appointment with a Career Services team member. Additionally, students can submit their resume to www.semo.edu/resumerescue for a complete review and recommended suggestions.

Delivery of Summer Coursework

As we continue to closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic, we have decided that all summer courses beginning prior to June 29 will be delivered online or remotely. Some courses during this period may be subject to change based on the course content and the ability to deliver remotely. Our current plan is that courses beginning June 30 through Aug. 7 will be taught both in-person and online, with courses to be conducted in the mode of delivery as they were originally scheduled. The first of several summer sessions begins May 18, and registration remains open.

Events

As you know, all University events on and off campus have been canceled through May 15, including use of University facilities by external individuals and groups. Today, I am extending that event cancellation period for all University events on and off campus through June 30. Please be advised that some events scheduled during this timeframe will be rescheduled to a later date, and event organizers will communicate that information when it becomes available.

I would like to particularly highlight a couple of those events:

Spring 2020 Commencement Ceremonies:

We previously announced that spring 2020 commencement ceremonies have been postponed. Today, I am pleased to announce that all Spring 2020 and Summer 2020 candidates for graduation will receive an invitation to participate in the commencement

program scheduled for Dec. 19, 2020, or May 15, 2021, during which they will be formally recognized. As communicated earlier, we invite graduating students at all levels (undergraduate or graduate) to share their favorite SEMO moment at semo.edu/senior. Faculty and staff also are invited to share memories of these students. We are planning to use these submissions to virtually recognize our Spring 2020 and Summer 2020 graduates in the days leading up to May 16, 2020, as this is the date they would have participated in commencement. We remind our candidates for graduation to consider submitting a memory if they have not already done so.

River Campus Summer Arts Festival and Productions

Our current plan is for the River Campus Summer Arts Festival, originally scheduled for June 20, to be held on Aug. 8, with the event taking place in a scaled-back format. All events will be held indoors at the River Campus. Start dates for the River Campus Summer Arts Festival productions have been pushed back with multi-day runs of “Bring It On” and Disney’s “101 Dalmatians KIDS” now scheduled to begin rehearsals on July 19 and July 20 respectively.

Redhawk Kids Camp

All Redhawk Kids Camps prior to June 30 are canceled. The camp will resume its regularly planned schedule after June 30.

More Information

For Southeast updates and a variety of other communication related to COVID-19, visit <https://semo.edu/sealerts/covid19/>. Additionally, if you have questions, email covid19@semo.edu.

Redhawk Resilience

In closing, I ask you for your continued patience as we actively work through many difficult situations facing us. I am extremely proud of each and every one of you for rising to the challenges confronting our University community. We are a resilient institution, and I am confident we will overcome this formidable public health crisis. In the days and weeks ahead, I ask you to remember your family, friends and co-workers during this very difficult time. While we are social distancing, many are in need of comfort, a reassuring voice, a text message or a phone call. Let us not forget the simplicity and genuine value of a kind gesture.

We are in this together as a Southeast community. Enjoy the designated holiday on Friday.

Carlos Vargas
President