



August 21, 2020

Dear Southeast Students:

With the campus move-ins nearly complete and classes beginning on Monday, August 24, we wanted to reach out and say how excited we are that you are here. You have chosen Southeast Missouri State University to pursue your higher education and your success here will lead to an exciting future of incredible opportunities.

We want you to know that just like you, we are even more excited for this semester to begin. It has been far too long since we have been together on our campus and experienced all the things that make SEMO such a special place. That list always starts with you, our students.

This week, you received a letter from President Vargas in which he stressed the importance for each of us to take personal responsibility for our actions in responding to COVID-19. As Dr. Vargas said, "This semester will require personal responsibility from each of us in ways we have never asked of you before." I assure you that an amazing amount of work has been and will continue to be done to keep you as safe and healthy as possible. You play a critical role as well.

We assume that many of you have heard stories about what is happening on campuses around the country. After just one week, COVID-19 infections spread during off-campus parties have upended face-to-face instruction at the University of North Carolina (UNC), and the University of Notre Dame, among others. UNC has moved entirely online for the semester. Notre Dame will try online for two weeks, in hopes they can contain their COVID-19 outbreak and return to face-to-face instruction. **This is not what we want to see happen at Southeast Missouri State University.**

We know you are excited to be together after so many months away, but we need you to look out for each other. We are not asking you to completely close yourselves off from your friends, organizations and peers, but rather to choose activities and interactions that can be held safely. Enclosed and crowded settings, especially with prolonged and close contact, have the highest risk of transmission while coordinated activities in outdoor settings in **smaller groups, while wearing face coverings and practicing appropriate physical distancing (at least 6' apart)** seem to present a much lower risk of harm.

Because of the seriousness of the current health crisis, it is important to understand that the University will have to take all appropriate actions to address continued reports of potential policy violations, including referrals to the Office of Student Conduct. This is a difficult message to have to share because we know that most of you are doing the right thing by adhering to the practices advised by state and local public health officials and following the [Protect the Nest Return to Campus Plan](#).

Our best chance of getting back to the Southeast experience we all want depends on your thoughtful cooperation with University guidelines. For those who choose not to follow the

guidelines, there may be further and progressive consequences via the code of conduct. This is not the path we want to take, but the health, well-being, and success of our entire Redhawk community is at stake.

We know we can do better. We want to keep everyone on campus and safe.

Let's pull together Redhawks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sonia R. Rucker".

Sonia R. Rucker
Vice President for Equity, Access and Behavioral Health
Dean of Students

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Debbie Below".

Debbie Below
Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success