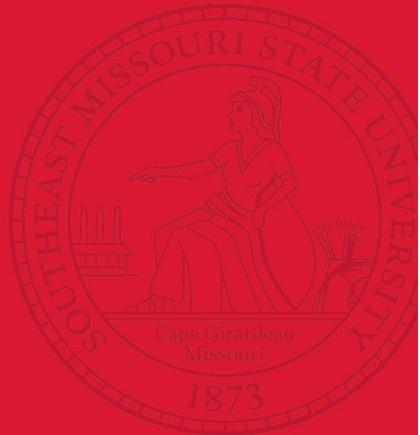


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OFFICE OF THE **PRESIDENT**



S O U T H E A S T M I S S O U R I S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y

Saturday, September 26, 2020

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students,

It has not been my practice to provide important University updates to you over a weekend; however, I believe that the recent article by *The Arrow* regarding the spring 2021 semester warranted a message directly from me to you on this topic. The initial story that the newspaper published Friday evening implied that I communicated to the Board of Regents during their meeting yesterday the cancellation of spring break. I appreciate the newspaper's updated story that clarifies that the changes to the spring semester that I outlined are not final. The plan I outlined at the Board of Regents' meeting is not final. That said, we know that changes will likely be necessary to the spring semester calendar, which may include starting one week later and eliminating spring break.

Every decision we have made during the University's response to COVID-19 has not been made lightly. As I have shared before, the University's Emergency Response Team (ERT) that is convened under the auspices of the University's Emergency Operations Center, has been meeting since March to review local, regional, and national information, assess risks, anticipate needs and situations, and make

recommendations to me to guide our response during these unprecedented times. That approach has not changed. The ERT has been instrumental in all that we have done and will continue to play a pivotal role in our actions going forward. This group of university representatives, which includes nearly 25 individuals from various units across campus, and includes a faculty representative, is to be commended for the work they have done.

Over the last several weeks, it has become clear through ERT discussions that we need to make a decision regarding the spring semester calendar. These discussions were in part fueled by feedback we were hearing from you – students, faculty and staff – and parents about wanting to know how to plan in the months ahead. Additionally, the University's current preparation for the spring includes October 5 as the date for the spring schedule to be viewable and for advising to begin in anticipation of registration for spring classes. Thus, the ERT believed, and I concurred, that it was important to engage in conversations about the spring calendar now and I felt it was important to share that information with the Board of Regents to alert them to the actions we are considering.

A final decision to eliminate spring break has not been made; however, a decision must be made soon. As I outlined during my report to the Board of Regents, the current proposal for the spring includes:

- Start January 25, 2021 (one week later than originally scheduled)
- Eliminate Spring Break
- End May 14, 2021 (as originally scheduled)

This is the plan being discussed by the ERT. Please know that units all across campus have contributed to this plan, as well as Faculty Senate, and Student Government. The plan was also distributed to Deans Council which shared feedback from their Department chairs and faculty. Additionally, options for the spring semester were discussed by the Enrollment Management and Student Success Council. Although there was some feedback from individuals in all of these constituencies that we

should not eliminate spring break, a majority see the safety value of taking these steps, and they are supportive of a plan that includes the elimination of spring break.

We know that this plan is not ideal, and we know that several of you have concerns. We do too. That is why we have engaged directly with Faculty Senate, Student Government, and all of the groups mentioned above, so we can work together to finalize a plan that addresses all concerns and considerations, to the extent we can. Those of you who were able to observe the Board of Regents meeting from the livestream may have heard this directly from me. The student and faculty presenters that followed me also offered support and encouragement for this plan, as well as recommendations to consider. With the feedback we have received, we will be working diligently this week to determine whether additional reading days or breaks can be worked into the spring semester within the confines of the proposal I referenced above.

Since *The Arrow's* initial story, I have seen comments on social media suggesting that any decision by Southeast now to eliminate spring break or adjust its spring calendar is premature and unfounded. These feelings are understandable. As the president, I see my responsibility to be cautious when the health and safety of the University community is at risk and the possibility exists to contribute to an outbreak of infections. I understand that some may feel that our plans are premature, that I am being too cautious, or unreasonably cautious. However, the alternative approach is not one that I am comfortable adopting. Let me also share that Southeast is not alone in its thinking. Earlier this week, another public institution of higher education in Missouri announced several adjustments to its spring calendar, including the elimination of spring break; and we believe a number of other schools are considering the same approach. Several schools in other states have also announced similar decisions. I have also seen comments from Southeast students and faculty suggesting these groups were not consulted and individuals are upset there was not an opportunity for feedback to be provided. This is categorically not the case. As referenced earlier, the ERT includes a faculty representative, and separate conversations were had with Faculty Senate leadership and Student Government

leaders specifically on the spring semester, and we will continue to confer with them this week.

In closing, I want to share again here my appreciation for everyone's patience and adjustments as we go through these uncertain times together. I know that some of the changes we've implemented and the plans and decisions we've made have caused concern for some of you. That said, I believe the changes we have made are what have allowed us to have an in-person experience this semester, and any future adjustments we may make will be to preserve the same for the spring. I am inspired and proud of the cooperation and support we've received and the resilience all of you have shown. Many of these same sentiments were also shared by several members of the Board of Regents during their meeting yesterday. Thank you for what you are doing to help our campus community, and I will share another update with you communicating final plans for the spring semester by Friday, October 2.

Sincerely,

