

Message from President Morehead, re: planning for return to campus

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students:

Few of us could have imagined, as we began Spring Break at the midpoint of our semester, the magnitude of disruption that was imminent. Little did we know that we would not be returning but would instead be completing instruction online, that our students would have to move out of the residence halls, that most of our research would be suspended, and that our campus would cease all but essential activities. Last week we celebrated a virtual Honors Week, and next week we will confer degrees online with the hope of having in-person Commencement ceremonies in the fall, health conditions permitting.

Uncertainty has been the theme of our lives over the past two months. We have demonstrated our resilience by adapting to a new normal, as we have sheltered in place in order to protect ourselves and each other during a global pandemic. Yet, even though our lives have been dramatically altered, the great work of our institution endures: our faculty continue to teach; our researchers are engaged in the quest for a COVID-19 cure and are helping to inform policy; and our faculty, staff, and students are serving communities across our state during this time of crisis.

Soon we will transition to Maymester and Summer Semester with courses continuing online for our students. I am pleased that enrollment for both of these sessions appears to be holding steady, but I recognize that many of the students who are registering are those who have had to forgo study abroad, internship or other experiential learning programs this summer. I regret that they will not have those opportunities.

All of us want to get back to an open and vibrant campus and resume normal operations, but that path will not be easy. There are many questions to be answered. Toward that end, I have been serving alongside four other presidents in the University System of Georgia under Chancellor Steve Wrigley's oversight to consider how the process of gradual reopening might occur over the summer. Chancellor Wrigley has accepted our recommendation to form working groups across all 26 USG institutions to consider a staggered, phased-in approach that is appropriate for the unique needs of each campus in the coming weeks. We also expect to receive substantial guidance and assistance from the USG on many challenging issues.

I have established nine working groups to begin evaluating a smooth transition to full operations here at UGA. These working groups will address workplace and health safety, instruction, research, public service and outreach, student life, enrollment management, athletics, communications, and fiscal impact. The groups are being led by senior administrators and involve nearly 140 members of our faculty and staff.

Our top priority in a phased, gradual reopening over the summer is the safety of our faculty, staff, and students. We must ensure that our plans promote a healthy and safe environment, comply with Executive Orders and directives from the Governor's Office, and reflect guidance from the Georgia Department of Public Health.

We are anticipating a resumption of in-person instruction for the Fall Semester beginning in August 2020 for all USG institutions. However, I would emphasize that this situation remains a fluid one, as the USG monitors developments related to COVID-19 and receives counsel from state public health officials. Guidance could be subject to change, even after our plans are put in place. We will need to remain flexible and patient as we move forward.

In closing, I want to thank you again for your resilience over the past several weeks. We still have much to do before we emerge from this crisis, but together we are heading in the right direction. The determination of Bulldog nation makes us all proud.

Sincerely,

Jere W. Morehead
President