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STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

COVID-19: March 14 2020 Update

Board Members:

I am providing you an update on the growing impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), nationally and in Florida, and want to assure you of the ongoing planning and preparation at our 12 state universities for an increase in the spread of the virus. All state universities, as well as Board of Governors staff, continue to regularly monitor and respond to statements of guidance on the COVID-19 virus from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) that are based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of the virus.

As you have most likely heard, to respond to the potentially serious impacts of COVID-19 on the health and safety of state university students, faculty, and staff, we have issued guidance to the state universities for the academic and operational continuity of the institutions during the virus outbreak. See my attached statement.

United States

The number of positive cases of the COVID-19 virus in the U.S. continues to increase and there are currently a few specific areas of significant spread in the country. The CDC is reporting over 2,000 COVID-19 cases in the United States with a current death toll of over 40. The CDC has stated that more cases are expected and recommends aggressive actions to mitigate identified positive cases and isolate the individuals in order to prevent spread. The availability of virus testing is being coordinated at the national level and the supply of testing kits continues to increase. Additionally, private laboratories and providers will now be able to administer and process the tests.

Colleges and universities have spent many weeks in preparation for the spread of the COVID-19 virus and are developing contingency plans for academic program delivery and campus activities in case the outbreak escalates. Following CDC recommendations, most colleges and universities have cancelled student/faculty foreign exchange and study abroad programs and coordinated the return of students and faculty to the U.S. Nonessential international travel has been cancelled. Institutions are also implementing restrictions on domestic travel and are strongly discouraging personal travel by students, faculty, and staff to areas with significant virus outbreaks. Most national conferences, athletic events, and large gatherings around the country have been cancelled. Many institutions are requiring or strongly encouraging faculty to

develop and utilize on-line course delivery methods and over 200 institutions have cancelled face-to-face classes for the remainder of the semester.

Colleges and universities are particularly concerned with the Spring Break weeks that typically occur from March through mid-April when students, faculty, and staff are travelling throughout the U.S. and beyond, raising the prospects of becoming exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Institutions are widely circulating precautionary information and guidance and some are implementing quarantine, self-isolation, and/or social distancing policies.

Florida

Governor DeSantis, following up on his March 1st Public Health Emergency declaration for Florida, issued an Executive Order on March 9th to declare a “State of Emergency” for the State in order to provide state agencies and institutions, health care providers, and communities with the resources and flexibility they need to prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 virus public health emergency. The Commissioner of Education has directed that all Florida public schools be closed for a two-week period to limit the spread of the virus. As of this writing, FDOH is currently monitoring the 83 positive cases of COVID-19: 70 Florida residents, six repatriated cases, and seven non-Florida residents. 221 citizens have pending test results. Three deaths have been reported.

State University System

All state universities have implemented campus-wide critical incident or emergency management teams that are meeting regularly to prepare for the impacts of the COVID-19 virus. The State University System home page, www.flbog.edu, now contains a link to each state university’s unique webpage which provides information, updates, and direction to their campus community regarding the COVID-19 emergency.

All universities are preparing to transition to remote instructional delivery for a two-week period during March and early April, depending on each institution’s Spring Break, and are informing students not to return to campus during this period. Plans and procedures are being developed for students who must remain on campus. The following additional actions and policies are being implemented or considered:

- Canceling Study Abroad programs
- Suspending non-essential travel to high risk countries identified by the CDC
- Expanding communications, providing guidance and alerts to the campus community
- Recommending travel guidance/precautions for Spring Break weeks
- Providing assistance to faculty for the preparation of academic course delivery via distance learning methods.
- Canceling non-essential campus activities, events, and large gatherings

- Preparing for possible quarantine and self-isolation mandates including off-campus housing and provisions for support services
- Providing assistance and support to students with personal hardships
- Reviewing sanitation protocols for all facilities; increased cleaning/disinfecting of high traffic areas
- Reviewing employment policies including working remotely, sick leave and compensation; responding to the impacts of public school closings
- Developing options for Spring commencement ceremonies
- Reviewing delivery of Summer Session programs and services

As you are aware, the Board of Governors will be conducting its March meeting via conference call and will not have a face-to-face meeting at USF as was originally scheduled. More details soon.

Resources

For your information, here are key links that can provide additional information and guidance on the COVID-19 virus:

- ❖ **World Health Organization** – <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- ❖ **U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** – www.cdc.gov
- ❖ **Florida Department of Health (FDOH)** – <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/COVID-19/index.html>
- ❖ **CDC – Guidance for Institutes of Higher Education:**
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/index.html>
- ❖ **American College Health Association (ACHA) Guidelines** – https://www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Preparing_for_COVID-19_March-3-2020.pdf

Take Good Care!



Syd Kitson, Chair

REMEMBER: *Wash hands often with soap & water for 20 seconds. If soap is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 % alcohol.*