

March 12, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

It is a difficult time for all of the UNM community. We are experiencing fear, doubt, and anxiety. The invisible virus, SARS-Cov-2, and the disease it causes, COVID-19, has spread around the world. And while most of us are in little danger of a poor outcome even if we should contract it, too many of our New Mexico neighbors – the elderly, the immunosuppressed, those with some chronic health challenges – are threatened.

We must take action to protect our most susceptible community members. The transmission of this virus is currently one of exponential growth, and we are early in the pandemic stage. We can mitigate and greatly minimize harm to our susceptible community members if we implement what public health experts call containment. Vulnerable populations infected by this virus can require complex hospital care. If we control the rate of exposure and slow the growth of the infected population, we “flatten the curve” and can ease the burden on vulnerable populations.

Our experts tell us that our window of opportunity to implement containment steps remains. If we pursue business as usual, we will not be able to flatten the curve and the mortality rate could be high in those vulnerable populations.

At the same time, both the present and the futures of our students depend on UNM. Some are at financial risk, and their ability to complete a college degree is delicate and easily derailed, too often forever. For many, we are their only provider of room and board, of health care, and of employment. While a few universities around the country are closing, this course can cause harm that may even be irreparable. In consultation with UNM experts on health, with UNM academic leadership, and with input from other academic institutions, we are launching a strategy to continue educational activities while also contributing to a national goal to reduce the rate of transmission and infection from this virus.

Right now there are some important steps that you can take to support our Lobo learners and the whole UNM community, and to contribute to the flattening of the curve.

Regarding Students:

1. Please ask your students to read this website <http://www.unm.edu/coronavirus/critical-info-for-unm-students.html> as they depart for spring break (or, in the case of pharmacy students, as they return).
2. Ask your students to remain alert to email communications from UNM, and from you. Point them to the <http://www.unm.edu/coronavirus> website for updates.
3. Let them know that we expect to continue classes after break, March 23, 2020, although there may be some changes in learning modalities for some of their classes.
4. Ask students to stay home if they are sick, and do not ask them to produce health care provider documentation of illness – securing such notes places healthy people with sick people, strains health care resources, and disincentivizes ill students from staying home.

Regarding Instructional Continuity:

1. Look for outreach from your dean or chair to begin to identify the most important courses to move from high-presence, face-to-face instruction, to lower-presence hybrid or online modalities. The goal is not necessarily to eliminate all in-presence instruction, but to reduce contact and hence minimize the probability of viral transmission in the educational environment.
2. Begin thinking about how to continue instruction in such lower-presence ways, or in ways that increase social distancing between participants in the instructional environment.
3. Set up your course now in UNMLearn. A checklist and other resources are available online <https://at.unm.edu/coronavirus/> to help you think about uses of technology to reduce the need for physical presence in learning. These resources will continue to evolve as we learn new practices.
4. Please remain in tight coordination with your chair or dean, so that we can make optimal choices about how to proceed collectively across the curriculum.
5. We recognize that some important forms of instruction might be inherently high-presence, for example clinical rotations, teaching internships, studio art classes, or laboratory courses. We will need your help to develop options to reduce the probability of transmission in these environments while allowing students to continue to progress.
6. Look for more communications on this topic.

Regarding You:

Your health and wellbeing matter. Most of us are at low risk relative to COVID-19, but some among us may have a suppressed immune system, or a respiratory problem, or other health condition that puts us at greater risk. Communicate your concerns and needs to your chair or dean, and make appropriate accommodations in your instructional and scholarly work to support your health. Get enough sleep, practice the other habits of good health, and don't come to work if you are sick.

This world-wide public health challenge is evolving in a dynamic and complex way. It will vex us in new ways each day. This is the time to come together with good humor, good will, and good grace. Each of us will define all of us.

Sincerely,

James Paul Holloway
Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs