

MARCH 18, 2020

Highlights from Provost's Answers to Faculty Senators' Questions - March 2020:

1. **Priorities:** Provost Fierke appreciated the Aggie Spirit and said that the two priorities are 1. to keep our community safe, and 2. to continue education to our students.
2. **Syllabus:** Instructors need to be flexible for exams and assessments, and grades. Although student feedback is that syllabus should not be changed, we have already lost a week, and some change in syllabus is needed.
3. **Grades:** Other institutions are considering pass/fail as an option for grades.
4. **Exams:** Zoom may be used for proctoring with 49 students per window. Faculty should think of other ways to assess progress. Dr. Stephenson said we are still investigating the best mechanisms for proctoring exams and detailed information is on the KeepTeaching webpage. Examity may be used but the students will not be charged using this mechanism.
5. **Final Exams:** Final exams will not be taken in person.
6. **Labs:** No in person exams may be implemented for undergraduate students. Regarding studios and labs, customized approaches per unit is being implemented. Since labs are so different across programs, colleges will need to internally work those issues and come up with a solution.
7. **Zoom and internet access:** Zoom has assured that they have the bandwidth, and the limitation could mainly be at user-level. Zoom calls are dispersed to different data centers. For students who are not in town, going to a library with internet access may be an option. An option could be to get an "Incomplete" for this semester if a student does not have internet access, but this is not a preferred solution.
8. **Students who have a disability:** Please ask students to re-send their accommodation letter to faculty, as disability services is over-worked, and faculty may help to take some of the load. For students who are disadvantaged, they can reach the student success office for advice.
9. **Technology:** Regarding technology and best practices, the provost office is updating the keepteaching.tamu.edu website where information is regularly updated. Regarding FERPA, best solution for posting grades is through eCampus.
10. **Students facing hardships:** If students are facing hardships, please utilize resources that are already available including financial and student counseling service, and many of these will eventually be moved online. For student workers, try to have them continue on their job.
11. **Ill-people on campus:** If we have ill-people on campus, please record this in work-day. For online courses, please include a second person on your roster who could potentially take over or find another replacement should you fall ill. If there are students who are not feeling well, please urge them to stay home. With staff and student workers, please stay home if you are ill. Supervisors need to be as flexible as possible.
12. **Graduate students:** Communication was sent to all graduate students from OGAPS (Dr. Butler-Purry). Please defend online and limit contact as much as possible. In person defense should not be required. Signatures can be obtained electronically.
13. **Testing for COVID-19:** For testing, there is testing in Brazos county and state is ramping up available testing.
14. **Library hours:** Dean Carlson of libraries may limit the number of students who can enter at any given time and simultaneously increase hours to maintain social distancing, but these are moving targets. Cleaning will be done in libraries and computer areas regularly.
15. **On-campus interviews:** Candidates should not be brought to campus unless there is an exception based on the needs and mission of the unit. Latest recommendations is to not fly especially if one has risk factors. Searches can be delayed as needed.
16. **In-person meetings on campus:** Do as much as possible by virtual meetings. 10 people or smaller in a room for 30. We don't want 1 person infecting a large number of people.
17. **Message from Dr. Barteau (VPR):** Please refer to email that went to the university community. Please refer to <https://vpr.tamu.edu/covid-19>. Labs should reduce the density of people who are working together. Labs must maintain social distancing. PIs should plan for reduced operations. SRS is still open, and resources regarding funding agencies are mentioned in <https://vpr.tamu.edu/covid-19>.
18. **Course evaluations:** This will be done but will NOT be counted.
19. **Message from President Young:** President Young shared the priorities 1. to keep faculty, staff, and students safe, and 2. to preserve teaching and certain kinds of research that cannot be interrupted. We are also focusing on graduation and that we should do everything possible to graduate on time. Critical elements of our university enterprise should be preserved. We are trying to be forward leaning in light of information that is available. We are trying to stay ahead of the moving target, and are trying to communicate as effectively as we can. We should also minimize non-essential services. He tremendously thanked the senior leadership at the university and to all university members for helping us move forward. He appreciated the "can-do" spirit of the Aggies.

Academic Updates

Listed below are some ideas that Dr. Julie Harlin, from ALED, posted to her Facebook page:

- Give up on teaching your class the way you always have. The sooner you can let go of the notion of students tuning in from 12:45-2:00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays and giving two more exams, the better off you will be.
- Realize that students are not in town and likely do not have great connectivity. They are also dealing with family who may be ill, have a loss of income, and are generally stressed and upset by all these changes. Expecting them to tune in at a specific time is difficult at best. Asynchronous delivery has some advantages in these crisis situations. It isn't worse than synchronous delivery, just different. Embrace the new.
- Reconsider your talking head for three hours a week. Consider giving students material to read, summarize, create an info graphic, etc. Engagement can look very different in an online environment. That is not just OK, it can be awesome.
- A talking head takes a lot of bandwidth, especially when recorded for long periods of time. Consider short videos (5 minutes or less), posting content in text or ppt files, and using synchronous class time Zoom sessions to discuss and answer questions from students. Record these (I recommend saving to your computer rather than the cloud for immediate access) and post the recording for students who were unable to attend.
- Consider setting intermediate time lines for doing readings, watching videos, etc. and selective release of your materials (having available for a full week).
- Rather than two big exams with 100 questions each, consider breaking information into smaller chunks, with smaller exams or more focused activities.
- Consider windows of time for availability of exams and quizzes rather than just during your class period. Giving some room for connectivity issues will make your life easier in the long run.
- Remember that flexibility is key. You didn't sign up to move your course online in the middle of the semester. Your students didn't sign up to switch to an online course in the middle of the semester. Practicing some flexibility, grace, and kindness goes a long way. Imagine if your own child, niece, or nephew were in your class--are you treating them as you would want your family members to be treated?
- Be creative. Think about assessing in ways that are appropriate for what you want students to learn. Sadly, we typically state higher level learning outcomes but assess with a low level multiple choice exam.
- Recognize that this isn't the usual semester and do your best to make the tools you have work to your advantage. Fancy isn't necessary. Don't let perfection be the enemy of the good.
- One of the principles of universal design is that what is good for one student is good for all. Captioning, sharing notes and presentation materials, and videos are good practices that help your students with documented disabilities as well as everyone else in your class.
- Rely on those with experience and expertise. We are here to have these conversations and help you learn the tools you need to survive the semester.



A message from Dr. Michael Stephenson, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Strategic Initiatives:

Dear Faculty:

Thank you for your efforts to help our students continue with their education. In an effort to keep faculty informed during this significant shift in our teaching mission, this email contains updates for faculty on training, course evaluations, exam options, disability resources, student notifications, and general announcements on teaching.

While the transition online is more difficult for some than others, please remember that all courses must be taught, synchronously or asynchronously, through the end of the semester. Additionally, we are asking all faculty to initiate contact with their students about more general plans for the course no later than Wednesday (March 18) and provide students with as much detail as is possible about changes to the course by Friday (March 20).

ADDITIONAL TRAINING FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTION

The Office for Academic Innovation, in partnership with the Center for Teaching Excellence and University Libraries, will continue supporting online and in-person training and consultation services through the rest of this week. Training topics for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday include:

- Getting Started with ZOOM
- Teaching with ZOOM
- Getting Started with eCampus

The schedule for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday is posted online [here](#) or at kepteaching.tamu.edu. *No registration is required.*

As a reminder, if you have any questions or need assistance **accessing** any of the resources, please contact [Help Desk Central](#) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you have any questions or need assistance **teaching online** with any of the resources, please contact the Office for Academic Innovation Service Desk 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. CDT Monday – Friday.

COURSE EVALUATIONS

Because courses are online for the rest of the semester, all student course evaluations will be administered electronically. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Evaluation will activate online student course evaluations in PICA for all departmental courses not yet activated (excluding directed studies, internships, research hours). It is important to note that instructors can add course/section specific items until April 10th at 5:00 p.m. by using the Instructor login at pica.tamu.edu. For additional questions, please e-mail PICA@tamu.edu. Provost Fierke has indicated that the online evaluations will move forward as scheduled but will not be used in this year's evaluations or in future promotion and tenure evaluations given the sudden shift in teaching delivery.

EXAM OPTIONS

Administrators from the university and our colleges, along with members of the Distance Education Coordination Committee, have engaged in extensive discussions on how to handle course exams. The primary concern for many faculty is not only how to administer an exam but also how to retain academic integrity. We have also engaged with peer institutions on how they are handling this issue. In short, there is not an ideal solution.

Given the fees that are associated with services that proctor online exams, we recommend that faculty begin considering alternatives for assessing student learning. The [Keep Teaching](#) website has added [new information](#) that may be useful in identifying alternative and meaningful ways of assessment as well as how to minimize issues of academic dishonesty.

However, given the unusual ending to this semester, it is perhaps not surprising that our methods of assessing student learning must be revisited with a creative focus on alternate assessment methods. We will continue to update the [Keep Teaching](#) site and the Distance Education Coordination Committee and college leadership as new information is collected or services change.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In the shift to online teaching, it's important to all of us to be mindful of students with disabilities. Please consider the following tips for teaching online:

- Email your class and ask those students with disabilities to send you their accommodations letter so that you have an accurate record of who needs accommodations for your class.
- With exams moving online, the Disability Resources Testing Center will be closed. If exams are given online, students with disabilities will also take exams online.
- Information about providing extended time for E-Campus exams can be found [here](#).
- Contact Disability Resources at disability@tamu.edu for questions not covered on the [Keep Teaching](#) website.

OTHER SERVICES

- The modified schedules for online services provided by the Academic Success Center, LAUNCH, the Math Learning Center, and the University Writing Center will be available Wednesday.
- VitalSource is providing free student access to all ebooks and other electronic resources from major publishers through May 25th. For additional information, please see information on [their website](#).
- University Libraries continues to update [their resource page](#) for faculty and students and to provide support for courses to help finish the semester.

INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS

While holding face-to-face discussions with students is permitted, for your safety and the safety of your students, we strongly encourage you to communicate with students through ZOOM, email, phone, or other electronic option. If you must interact face-to-face, please follow the recommended guidelines of maintaining at least a six-foot distance between you and another individual. Students cannot be required to meet with you face to face, and alternatives must exist for **all** meetings with students.

MOVING FORWARD

We deeply appreciate your flexibility and your commitment to offer a superior education to the students of Texas A&M. I'd encourage you to keep two things in mind as you move forward. First, this is a massive disruption not only to our lives, but also to those of our students. The level of stress that we all have not only about online learning, but about everything else that is happening around us, is monumental. The effect is far more pronounced on some than others. Please take care of yourselves and each other. Second, as a department head shared with me this week, it's perfectly reasonable for us to focus on those simple solutions to get us through the end of the semester. While admirable and appreciated, not all of us can or need to use sophisticated or multiple technologies. Instead, we should focus on those solutions which allow us to do the best we can given the situation in which we find ourselves. We tend to learn valuable skills during times of adversity, even when we would rather not encounter it.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Stephenson

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Strategic Initiatives

Research Updates:

Dear Research Administrator Community,

Sent on behalf of Mark A. Barteau, Vice President for Research

As the situation with the COVID-19 virus continues to evolve, there will be challenges to carrying out our research mission, as well as our educational mission. The Vice President for Research has established a [webpage](#) that will be accessible from the [TAMU.edu/coronavirus](#) webpage and will provide regular information updates. In the meantime, we are sharing the initial content for immediate guidance in FAQ format so that faculty and researchers on all campuses with active research programs can plan to best manage their ongoing research programs.

For additional information, please go to [TAMU.edu/coronavirus](#) for the most current Texas A&M University response concerning the coronavirus.

David Hollingsworth | Director Preaward

Sponsored Research Services | Texas A&M University

3578 TAMU | College Station, TX 77843-3578

400 Harvey Mitchell Parkway South, Suite 300 | College Station, TX 77845-4375

Ph: 979.847.7638 | dhollingsworth@tamu.edu

Extension Updates:

Sent on behalf of AgriLife Extension Service Director Dr. Jeff Hyde

Extension colleagues,

Please see the latest agency updates below.

Additional resources are available at <http://texashelp.tamu.edu> and <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>

UPDATED/NEW INFORMATION:

Programming

As the landscape and parameters around this pandemic continue to change, our guidance and best practices will be re-evaluated on March 19. Updated information will be coming on Friday of this week.

Emergency Management

The State Medical Operations Center (SMOC) run by the Texas Department of State Health Services has been activated for several weeks now. It is anticipated that the State Operations Center led by the Texas Division of Emergency Management will stand up later this week and AgriLife Extension Disaster Assessment Recovery agents may be deployed to provide assistance.

Virtual Programs

Texas 4-H is offering virtual programs Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week for the next five weeks via Facebook Live. More details are at: <https://www.facebook.com/texas4h>. On Tuesday March 17, over 5,000 people accessed this learning opportunity.

TexasData Monthly Reports

The TExAS system will be locked on Friday, March 20. To correctly identify COVID-19 related contacts when reporting to TexasData, please ensure that the word Covid19 appears in any/all of the following applicable locations:

When Reporting Educational Sessions

Include the word Covid19 in your session title.

When Reporting Use of Educational Resources

Include the word Covid19 in the Educational Resource Description when adding resources such as handouts. This should be routinely used given the variety of handouts provided in the previous message.

When Reporting Mass Media or Newsletters

Include the word Covid19 in Mass Media Notes or Newsletter Notes when reporting television, radio, newspaper, or newsletters.

Additionally, please ensure your overall Report Notes mention Covid19 for any task that concerns Covid19, even if not all sessions within the task were Covid19-related. When in doubt, if it concerns Covid19, add the word Covid19 to the title and any notes fields.

Extension Position Searches

The Directors Office of AgriLife Extension is encouraging the Department Heads and ADH/PLs to continue their position searches utilizing distance technologies. This would be for the positions we approved in January 2020 and in 2019.

You can utilize distance technologies for both search committee meetings and for the initial interview process; up to entering into the final stages of the interview process. When the field of candidates have been narrowed, you are encouraged to conduct an initial distance interview with the subset of candidates identified by department leadership and the search committee. At that point Departments/Units will need to consult with the Director's Office to determine the next steps to be taken.

During each distance interview, include an interview time slot with the appropriate Associate Director and when applicable the appropriate Regional Program Leaders and District Extension Administrators. This process should be followed until further notice.

If you have further questions, please contact Dan Hale or Courtney Dodd.

REMINDERS, TRAININGS:

As face-to-face meetings this week have been cancelled, many of you will be evaluating programming options to determine if curriculum can be offered online. The following digital resources are available to offer upcoming programs at a distance:

- **WebEx:** AgriLife Extension has access to [WebEx for online program delivery in counties and regions.](#)
- **Zoom:** Campus-based delivery options are available through Zoom (for non-agents). Online training sessions will be this week on Wednesday at 11 a.m. and Friday at 11 a.m. To join: <https://agrilife.zoom.us/j/400857546>
- **Teams:** Teams can be accessed via the TEAMS application on your work laptop or via a web browser on your home computer by going to <https://teams.office.com> and logging in with your AgNet credentials (firstname.lastname@AGNET.tamu.edu). For how-to guides and overview on how to utilize features such as web conferencing, chat, file sharing and other features of TEAMS please go to: <https://firstcallhelp.tamu.edu/whats-new/teams/>. The following trainings have been set up for agents and specialists. Center-based specialists can join the training based upon the region in which they are located, while campus-based specialists can join the West Region session.
 - Wednesday, March 18th at 10:00 am: Southeast Region - [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)
 - Wednesday, March 18th at 2:00 pm: South Region - [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)
 - Thursday, March 19th at 10:00 am: West Region (and campus-based Extension personnel)- [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)
 - Thursday, March 19th at 2:00 pm: East Region - [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)
 - Friday, March 20th at 10:00 am: North Region - [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)
 - Friday, March 20th at 2:00 pm: Central Region - [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)

Blair L. Fannin

Associate Director of Extension Communications

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service | Texas A&M University System

600 John Kimbrough Boulevard, Suite 509

2142 TAMU | College Station, TX 77843-2142

979.845.2259 | Blair.Fannin@ag.tamu.edu

<https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu>

Due to the global COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and restrictions on event sizes announced by the White House, Spring graduation ceremonies will be postponed. The university is planning mail delivery of diplomas to graduates (with normal shipping costs waived) and is also considering opportunities for in-person ceremony options later this summer for those May graduates wishing to do so. There is no impact at this time to August in-person graduation ceremonies.

Three other major decisions made today include the following:

- Final exams will not be taken in person. Online testing and other mechanisms for the assessment of student learning are under consideration in collaboration with college deans and faculty and will be announced in the near future.
- [Family Weekend](#), a 101-year-old tradition filled with dozens of events scheduled for April has also been canceled.
- The [Campus Muster Committee](#) announced that the campus Muster Ceremony would not be held in its traditional in-person format in Reed Arena. The Muster Committee is working closely with The Association of Former Students to provide guidance to the campus and the entire Aggie Network.

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic last week, prompting Brazos County, the State of Texas and the federal government to declare a public health emergency. Meanwhile, the White House advised Americans to [avoid social gatherings](#) of more than 10 people.

The Association of Former Students announced earlier today that Aggie Ring Day scheduled for April has been canceled. Alternate plans were sent to recipients through an [email notification](#). Students will be able to have their ring mailed to them or they can pick it up at the Williams Alumni Center after Texas A&M resumes normal operations.

President Michael K. Young said that leaders at the university recognize how the cancellations and changes associated with the virus have created uncertainty and disappointment.

“These are very difficult decisions made with careful thought and input from faculty, staff and students,” Young said. “Around the world and here in Aggieland, the unprecedented disruption and sprawling impact of the pandemic are unfolding at a precious time for our university — graduation, finals, major events. And at the same time, we know that most essential is preserving health and safety and continuing to support ongoing education online.”

“Aggies always rise to the occasion and I’m confident we will do so in this situation,” he said. “We need to take care of each other, support one another and together we will find our way through.”

[Frequently Asked Questions](#) and other updated information can be viewed on the [TAMU COVID-19 Guidance site](#).

SICK EMPLOYEES:

Below is information about what to do if you have an employee who is ill. We do not want ill personnel on our campus! Please share the request to stay home if they are sick with all of your personnel.

If an employee shows signs or symptoms that are consistent with COVID-19, the institution should properly document their direct threat assessment based on objective, factual information, not subjective perceptions or fears.

The EEOC's regulations identify four factors to consider when determining whether an employee poses a direct threat: (1) the duration of the risk; (2) the nature and severity of the potential harm; (3) the likelihood that potential harm will occur; and (4) the imminence of the potential harm.

In addition, according to Husch Blackwell's guidance, employees who are exhibiting symptoms of an acute respiratory infection must be separated from co-workers and should be sent home.

Jorge D. Canales | Managing Counsel Litigation and Dispute Resolution

Office of General Counsel

The Business Office is being asked to track and document any additional expenses related to COVID-19. Please note this when turning in receipts.

We received the following guidelines:

We are recommending everyone use of the "C19" notation in AggieBuy and Concur and asking units to also:

- Retain detailed documentation (receipts) for each expense; include the purpose and benefit
- Keep Workday payroll reports to document any overtime pay, special situations, etc
- Follow all procurement guidelines
- See examples below.

PO business unit	06-Texas A&M AgriLife Research (06)
PO Department	06-TAES (06-TAES)
Invoice Owner	Kimberly Payne
Invoice Date	3/10/2020
Discount Date	3/20/2020
Due Date	4/9/2020
Terms	1% 10, Net 30
Terms Discount	0.06 USD
Invoice Name	Test invoice
Order Category	1 - Regular
Contract Number	no value
Report Reference A	C19
Report Reference B	no value
Rush the Pymt Process	X
Bypass Invoice Allocator	no value

AggieBuy
Example

Concur header-Purpose/benefit field
Report header for: Fusion 2020 - Orlando

Policy	Destination
Travel	Fusion 2020 - Orlando
Report Date	Purpose & Benefit
01/16/2020	C19-To attend and participate in Concur's Fusion 2020

Expenses	Expense Type	Amount	Requested
<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	01/14/2020 Travel Agent Fees AGENT FEE 89074157090111	\$2.00	\$2.00
<input type="checkbox"/>			

Concur - Line item example

Expense Type	Transaction Date	Business Purpose
Travel Agent Fees	01/14/2020	
Vendor Name	City	Payment Type
AGENT FEE 89074157090111		Travel Card Agency Liability
Amount	Unallowable Charge	Comment
2.00 USD	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Travel Classification	Clearing Account	FAMIS REF-A
Employee-Out of State	06-010400-0000	C19
		FAMIS REF-B

Division of
Information
Technology:

Division of IT Walk-In
Support to Remain
Open

Wherever possible, we recommend using remote support via phone, chat, and email, 24/7. Please contact Help Desk Central at 979.845.8300 or helpdesk@tamu.edu for IT support.

However, after further consideration, Division of IT support locations will remain open for walk-in support. Social distancing will be required (i.e. 6 feet between people), with a maximum of 10 individuals in the walk-in area at any time. We will continue with cleaning of these areas.

Division of Information
Technology
IT.tamu.edu

During the March Biosafety Compliance Network (Online) Meeting it was brought to our attention:

If you have an IBC permit to conduct your research there is a new Biosafety Manual that was revised February 2020. Please make sure you are using the most current version.

<https://rcb.tamu.edu/biohazards/biosafety-manual>

It was also brought to our attention that the VPRs Office is maintaining a website for Research Guidance During the COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://vpr.tamu.edu/covid-19>

COVID-19 Statement from LAUNCH: UGR for NSF-REU and Summer Undergraduate Research Experiences

After consulting with the Vice President for Research at TAMU, it is strongly recommended that Texas A&M groups planning to host REU and other SURE programs cancel plans for summer 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All LAUNCH: UGR sponsored summer research program events are cancelled. Please direct questions about training to Environmental Health and Safety (<https://ehs.tamu.edu/about-us/contact-us/>).

For groups that are receiving funds from outside agencies, please consult directly with those agencies to see what policies and extensions are in place. Some useful links can be found here:

- NSF: https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/covid19/covid19faqs_proposerandawardee.pdf
- NIH: https://grants.nih.gov/grants/natural_disasters/coronavirus.htm
- NEH: <https://www.neh.gov/news/information-neh-and-covid-19>

Stay healthy, and please let us know if you have any additional questions.

All best,

Dr. Sarah M. Misemer

Annabelle G. Aymond

A. Nicole Guentzel

And the rest of the UGR team