An Update on Instructional Preparations and Safety Planning for Fall 2020

Dear Tarleton Faculty,

Tarleton State University has been working collaboratively with Texas A&M University System offices in developing a set of safety practices, levels of operation, and instructional strategies to provide a safe high quality learning environment for our students. We are fortunate to have the TAMUS Health Science Center, School of Public Health and Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) to provide guidance in developing these practices.

Safety Practices

Testing - The A&M system has procured and will distribute a supply of COVID-19 tests to each member institution on a monthly basis. These tests will be used for community surveillance and monitoring as well as testing students, faculty and staff who may be exposed or have symptoms. By contract, testing results will be available within 30 hours. Our test kits will use oral cavity swab techniques.

Contact Tracing - The Texas A&M School of Public Health will provide contact tracing for Tarleton State University. Students, faculty and staff who are exposed will be expected to quarantine for 14 days. This safety practice will require us to be as flexible as possible with our instructional delivery modes in the event a faculty member and/or students are quarantined during the term. Flexible teaching modes are addressed in a later section. For successful contact tracing, it is important for faculty to develop a mechanism for taking attendance for each meeting of face-to-face instruction.

PPE - Governor’s executive order will require face coverings for all individuals in public indoor spaces including classrooms, labs and research spaces. Face shields and masks are being purchased and will be available for faculty use in the classrooms. Face shields and face masks have similar efficacy and face shield use by faculty will permit students to read lips if necessary.

Social Distancing - Classrooms will be set up for social distancing. This means the capacity of many of our classrooms will be greatly reduced. A team of individuals are currently evaluating each classroom for social distancing capacity. Some classes will be relocated in order to accommodate enrollment and assist with social distancing requirements. Please be as flexible as possible.

Exits/Entrances and Hallways - Classrooms may have some doors labeled as exits and some as entrances in order to manage traffic flow as safely as possible. Likewise, some hallways and stairwells will be designated as one way. Elevators will have limited capacity and areas where individuals typically congregate (like breakrooms) will have reduced capacity.

Meetings - Meetings should be conducted by zoom or other remote connectivity method. Groups of fewer than 10 may meet in person provided they can adhere to social distancing and face coverings are worn.
**Office Hours**-should be maintained in a virtual fashion. If you invite individuals into your office please social distance and use face coverings.

**STAY HOME**-students, faculty and staff will be expected to stay home (or residence halls) if they are sick or have any symptoms of fever, coughing, sneezing, loss of smell or taste or if you have been exposed to someone with symptoms or positive case. Due to the broad range of symptoms many students and faculty will need to elect to stay home with some frequency. This also will necessitate the most flexible modes of teaching and learning.

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**Levels of Operation**

The Texas A&M University System is currently defining four levels of operation during the COVID-19 environment. These levels include:

1. Standard COVID-19 Operations
2. Heightened Awareness
3. Extreme Caution
4. Remote Operations

The safety practices described above and the instructional modes described below are associated with the standard Covid-19 operations or level 1. Each mode of operation will have certain public health metrics associated with triggering that operational level. Levels 2 and 3 have progressively reduced levels of staff on site and increased shift to remote and on-line instruction. Level 4 is completely remote and resembles our level of operation following spring break last spring.

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**Personal Health and Instructional Continuity Plans**

**Risk Factors**-Those faculty who have risk factors which place them at high risk should document those with your medical professional and provide them to Employee Services. Modifications to your teaching mode or additional instructional support may be considered to assist in providing a safe working environment.

Individuals living in your home under your care who are high risk.-If you have individuals living in your home and under your care who are high risk, you should visit with employee services about use of FMLA.

Instructional Continuity-In the event a faculty member becomes severely ill and may no longer contribute even through remote or on-line instruction, academic department heads have been asked to develop an instructional continuity plan for course coverage. Department heads will have pre-identified two layers of alternate instructors for each course. Please plan with those selected to provide instructional continuity for each of your courses and develop a plan for smooth transition of courses in progress.
**Delivery Modes**

Two delivery modes will dominate instruction during the COVID-19 environment.

**On-line** – Many of our programs offer a significant portion of their courses on-line. Some graduate programs and baccalaureate completion programs are fully on-line. Programs that have previously offered on-line courses will continue to do so.

**HyFlex** – Courses that previously would have been taught in a face-to-face, blended, hybrid, or lecture with on-line components (LWOC) modes, will all be offered in the HyFlex mode. The HyFlex mode is a highly flexible hybrid course. Hybrid courses are typically a blend of on-line and face-to-face learning. The HyFlex course is a blend of on-line, face-to-face, remote synchronous, and remote asynchronous learning. Since classrooms are configured for social distancing, not all enrolled students will be able to attend class at the same time. This will be particularly true for high enrollment classes.

It is our plan to try to enable each student to attend a face-to-face class for each course at least once a week. It may be possible for a class with small enrollment and a larger class space to meet face-to-face more often. Larger classes may have face-to-face opportunities less often. Most classes will be able to split the class in half or thirds for their face-to-face assigned day. For example, if you have a Tuesday/Thursday class, half the students would attend face-to-face on Tuesday while the other half participate in that session through remote synchronous instruction. On Thursday, the students will switch. Faculty members will need to communicate with students prior to the first day of class to let them know which day of the week they should attend the face-to-face classroom. Deliberate techniques should be used to engage the portion of students who are participating in the synchronous remote mode. All classes will be recorded and posted in canvas so any enrolled student may view them in an asynchronous fashion. As stated above, this high level of flexibility will be important when students or faculty become ill, or have to quarantine or isolate. A team is currently reviewing class enrollments and room capacities to determine the best classroom assignment that will enable us to maximize learning mode options.

During this summer term all classrooms are being upgraded with more sophisticated recording equipment to improve the asynchronous experience. A detailed instructional guide for faculty has been prepared by Center for Educational Excellence. A link to this detailed guide is forthcoming.

Because of social distancing all final exams will need to be given on-line or in a remote fashion, so we may complete the exam process in the week scheduled. Faculty should use instructional time following the thanksgiving break to conduct reviews, give make up labs or exams and prepare students for the final exam period.
**Instructional Training**

Extensive trainings in the HyFlex mode are being conducted throughout the summer. A cohort of 50 faculty have been participating in an in-depth training. Starting this week trainings are being moved into each department to prepare additional faculty in this instructional design method. A link to the instructional training schedule is provided below.

This is a challenging and extraordinary time. We will continue to work with our system colleagues to identify and implement best practices for a safe learning environment. I hope everyone is staying safe and enjoying your family this summer.

Sincerely,
Karen Murray