

May 29, 2020

Dear Faculty Colleagues:

Thank you again for all you did to make the last half of the semester a success as judged by all reasonable standards. Parents, students, and others have sent many notes of gratitude and praise for how the University, in particular faculty members, have handled the pandemic. We join them in thanking you.

We now write about the future. We hope that you have all read the plans for the fall semester Fr. John outlined in his recent [letter](#). We write to provide additional background on the motivation for the University's decision to reopen in August, explain some of the many health and safety protocols that are being put in place, and outline the potential impact on the work of the academy and the steps we are taking to support you in adjusting to those impacts. Very importantly, we also write to solicit your suggestions on ways that we can improve these plans and systems to better serve our core missions of teaching and research. This is a long email, which we also attach as a searchable pdf.

Motivation for the decision to reopen in August

While we are all hopeful that scientific researchers will discover a vaccine for the novel coronavirus, the reality is that vaccine development takes time, typically years, and is often characterized by unpredictable setbacks and advances. Once a vaccine is developed, it will take additional time to manufacture sufficient doses and then get people vaccinated.

We would be delighted to be surprised by rapid development and deployment of a vaccine, but in the meantime, we must adjust to our new normal and come back together as a University community. The decision to start earlier in August was motivated by a desire to complete the fall semester before the Thanksgiving holiday. Fr. John made the decision to reopen the University in August only after he felt confident that we could develop and implement plans that will help protect our faculty, staff, and students. While we cannot construct an entirely risk-free environment (in fact, the campus has never been risk-free), we are committed to adopting the best advanced technologies and practices in support of our commitment to the holistic education that is at the core of our Catholic mission.

Dealing with COVID-19 presents us with enormous challenges—not just as a University, but also as a people and as a society. We encourage you to read this [editorial](#) in *Science* magazine written by the leaders of the Pontifical Academies entitled “The Moment to See the Poor.” Now more than ever, the world needs us to deliver on our critical commitments to training the next generation and advancing the knowledge frontier, all shaped by our distinctive Catholic commitment to take care of each other.

Health and safety protocols that are being put in place

Our fundamental concern and challenge is to protect the health and safety of our faculty, students, and staff members as we work to provide the highly personalized education that characterizes the distinctive Notre Dame experience. University leaders, including representatives from the Provost's Office, are meeting regularly and often with the Deputy Health Director for St. Joseph County, Dr. Mark Fox, to ensure that Notre Dame has the most up to date information on COVID-19 in our home community. We will provide more details on all of the topics below as they become available.

COVID-19 Playbook

All of the information laid out in this email, with additional detail, is being compiled into a Notre Dame COVID-19 playbook, which will be available in multiple formats, including on the web. We will update you once we post the playbook so you have ready access to all the latest and most detailed policies and processes that are guiding our efforts.

Personal protective equipment

All faculty, staff, and students will be provided with three cloth masks. We have identified a supplier for the masks, expect the masks to arrive in June, and are developing plans to deliver them to all community members.

Classrooms and other instructional spaces

We are developing a number of public health-based protocols that will govern classrooms and other instructional spaces. These protocols will address, among other things, student spacing, classroom arrangement, mask-wearing requirements, and cleaning protocols.

Health checks

We are evaluating software that will support daily health checks by faculty, staff, and students. In making decisions, we are focused on approaches that provide useful information for managing COVID-19 on campus while still protecting the privacy of our community members.

Testing

We hope to stand up an on-campus site for testing for COVID-19. This will facilitate our ability to manage the pandemic on our campus. Because testing technologies are changing so rapidly, we are intentionally holding for a few weeks before firming up our plans. In making plans, we are focused on the sensitivity, specificity, availability, and turn-around time of tests. We have already initiated relationships with the major vendors of tests in the United States and are well positioned to execute a plan as we get clarity on the effectiveness of different tests.

Isolation and quarantine

While the actual requirements are essentially the same, isolation refers to managing those with active and confirmed cases; quarantine refers to managing those who have been in close contact with confirmed cases. We are working on protocols for those whom we will ask to isolate or quarantine.

Contact tracing

In public health practice, when an individual tests positive for a disease like COVID-19, public health officials work to identify and notify others with whom the person has been in close contact. This process is known as contact tracing. We are working with the local health department to determine how best to structure contact tracing in ways that serve our University, as well as the City of South Bend and St. Joseph County. Again, our two key requirements are providing useful information for managing COVID-19 while still protecting the privacy of our community members.

Vaccination

We encourage all members of the Notre Dame community to get the flu vaccine once it is available. We already have a confirmed order for flu vaccines for the campus and will make receiving a vaccine on campus as easy as possible. In addition, the [CDC recommends pneumococcal vaccination](#) for all children younger than 2, all adults ages 65 years and older, people ages 2 through 64 with certain medical conditions, and adults ages 19 through 64 who smoke cigarettes. We encourage you to talk to your physician about this vaccine as needed.

Behavior change

Compliance with public health protocols is just as important as the protocols themselves. We have engaged a team of communication specialists from across the University to design an extensive outreach and engagement campaign aimed at reminding all of us what we are expected to do and why those behaviors are important. All of us are especially well positioned to model the way for our students, and we hope you will engage willingly and consistently in these efforts. Notre Dame has a long tradition of creating a community of respect that cares for the dignity of others. In light of the challenges we face, living out these values is more important than ever. At the same time, these values now call us not only to change our behavior, but even the culture of the way we interact with each other. As members of the Notre Dame community, we must endeavor to hold ourselves and others responsible and accountable for our individual and collective behaviors. The viability of our University and our ability to carry out our Catholic mission to make the world a better place all depend upon each and every one of us.

Slowing and stopping rules

Even as we make extensive protective plans, we need to be constantly evaluating whether what we are doing is working. We are currently developing slowing and stopping rules; i.e., metrics that would lead us to further restrict activities, or if necessary, again send students home. We are developing those rules with advice and guidance from our local health department and medical experts locally and nationally. We are leveraging the expertise of our own faculty in developing models and dashboards that will inform our slowing and stopping rules.

Potential impact on the work of the academy and what we will do doing to support you in adjusting to those impacts

The new normal to which we must all adjust includes profound impacts on teaching, research, scholarship, and creative endeavors at Notre Dame, requiring changes to our curriculum, teaching methods, learning environments, and behaviors.

Making courses modular and flexible

To prepare for potential disruptions during the academic year, we are asking faculty members to restructure their semester-long courses into two distinctive periods or halves, with separate learning goals, assignments, and assessments for each. We currently intend to award a single semester grade for each course, but this approach leaves open the option for grading the individual periods. In practice, this is not substantially different from what many of you, who give mid-term exams, do already. The overarching goal of this effort is to avoid semester-long setbacks in the event of a significant disruption and create opportunities to flex our academic calendar as needed to keep students progressing toward their scheduled graduation. We are developing dates for the full academic calendar for the fall and will provide them to you soon.

Dual delivery of courses

Our goal is to offer the rich educational experience characterized by in-person instruction, but we recognize that there may be students who must attend online because they are in isolation or in quarantine. In addition, faculty members may themselves be in isolation or quarantine. As a way to build flexibility and resiliency into classroom instruction, faculty members teaching classes this fall should prepare to deliver their courses with most students present in the classroom but some attending remotely. All classes should be recorded to allow students to review previously presented material and ensure we are ready to transition to remote delivery should it be necessary to do so at any time during the semester. The following University-wide support is available:

- ND Learning will offer a series of workshops, consultations, and readiness training programs throughout the summer specifically designed to help faculty members make their fall courses more resilient.
- ND Learning is also working closely with OIT to ensure our classrooms and other teaching spaces have the appropriate technologies to support dual delivery of classes.
- Faculty members may contact ND Learning (learning@nd.edu or 574-631-9146) for further information regarding preparation and training for dual-mode delivery. You can also visit: <https://instructionalcontinuity.nd.edu/>
- More detailed guidance on summer readiness training and other instructional support programs will be forthcoming.

Course and classroom scheduling

We are exploring creative solutions to use classrooms and other on-campus spaces to accommodate physical distancing requirements. As a result, you may be assigned different classrooms and/or different class times than what was previously scheduled. These decisions are being made in collaboration with deans and department chairs. Preliminary analyses suggest that if we activate some non-traditional spaces for use as classrooms (e.g., some spaces in DPAC and Washington Hall), we should be able to accommodate health and safety precautions in nearly all of our classes. We are working with deans on models to extend the teaching day to accommodate all classes. The Registrar will communicate any necessary changes.

Laboratories and close-contact courses

We are still developing protocols and making decisions regarding classes that require closer contact such as science and engineering labs, music courses, and art and design classes.

Graduate student progress to degree

We recognize that the disruption this spring and summer may have slowed some graduate students' progress to degree. The Dean of the Graduate School is working very closely with the deans, associate deans, and directors of graduate studies in each program to identify student needs for additional time, and financial and academic accommodation. There will be a process in place for a graduate student and faculty mentor to indicate need, and for the mentor, program, college and Graduate School to provide additional stipend support as needed. Extensions of Graduate School and departmental deadlines are also being evaluated.

Graduate stipends

Given the early start date for the academic year, we are working through the potential implications for graduate student stipends. There are a number of internal and external issues regarding start and end dates, pay periods, and enrollment date for the University-sponsored health plan. We continue to examine these issues and will provide additional information as it becomes available.

International Students and Scholars

Many of you may have international students in your courses or international scholars in your departments who may not be able to arrive on campus in time for the start of the semester due to the current challenges of securing a student visa. The International Students and Scholar Affairs office within Notre Dame International continues to support these students and scholars, helping them comply with changing regulations, monitoring travel bans and embassy closures, and assisting them with academic and student life issues. For any questions about these members of our community, please reach out to Notre Dame International.

There are a series of legal and immigration issues surrounding incoming international students who are unable to secure visas and/or travel to the University of Notre Dame campus to begin classes in person at the start of the fall semester on August 10, 2020. We are working through these issues and will provide an update soon.

Research laboratories, core facilities, and creative art studios

Starting May 26, we will begin reopening research laboratories, core facilities, libraries, and studios in phases, according to [guidance](#) issued earlier this week. Those who wish to receive updates and lessons learned during this process are encouraged to sign up for the [Lab/Studio Google group mailing list](#). Additional information is available at the following websites:

- [Lab/Studio Reopening Playbook](#)
- [Research Continuity webpage](#)

To report an issue or make a suggestion about the reopening of these facilities, a [quick response form](#) has been set up. This form can be submitted anonymously if preferred.

Charging support to research grants

Some faculty colleagues have raised questions about the impact that the change in the academic calendar for the fall of 2020 could have on their ability to charge research grants for their work on those grants performed outside the academic term (typically work done in the summer). Effort certification is done on a semiannual basis and the fall 2020 academic term, while shifted in time, has not been lengthened. Faculty will be able to certify up to two months of full-time effort outside the fall academic term on their grants during the period from July 1 to December 31. Because of the shift of the academic term, a portion of the grant funded "summer support" may be paid in December rather than August.

Library Operations

Starting May 28, the Hesburgh Libraries staff will begin accepting requests for physical materials submitted through the catalog. In the meantime, users can continue to request scans of hard-copy materials from the libraries via electronic document delivery. The libraries will accept the return of borrowed materials from undergraduates from May 22–June 14 and from faculty and graduate students beginning June 15. More information is available on the [Hesburgh Libraries COVID-19 Service Continuity](#) website.

Welcoming new faculty and staff members

The early start to the fall semester has many implications for our normal orientation programs and activities, including those for new faculty and staff. We encourage those of you who are welcoming new faculty and staff to our community to actively reach out and keep them informed about department-level plans and activities. At the same time, we will update them as we go forward on plans for their more formal introduction and orientation.

Travel

With input from the local health department and medical health professionals, we are developing policies on travel away from campus, as well as on visitors to campus. We will be sure to update you on this soon.

Academic policy adjustments

As you may be aware, during the spring 2020 semester, in regular consultation with deans, department chairs, and faculty committees, we made more than 20 temporary academic policy adjustments, many made rapidly as we adjusted to our new circumstances. For the 2020-2021 academic year, we hope to have the set of required academic adjustments approved before the start of the year – while still acknowledging that circumstances may once again require us to make changes on the fly.

Concerns about in-person instruction

As Fr. John highlighted in his May 18 letter on reopening campus, the personal interaction between students and faculty in and outside the classroom is critical to the education and holistic formation we strive to offer at Notre Dame. That is why we are bringing our students and faculty back to campus in August. Thus, to the extent possible, faculty members should expect to teach their classes in person. As outlined above, we are implementing a comprehensive set of health and safety protocols to protect the health and safety of our faculty, students, and staff members in classrooms and scholarly spaces.

We know that a number of faculty and staff members and their families have health conditions that place them at increased risk of a severe case if they do contract the virus. We understand that these faculty and staff, and possibly students as well, will ask for additional accommodations to address these concerns. To ensure consistency and fairness across campus, the University is finalizing a process to address such requests. Additional information will be provided as soon as it is available.

Soliciting your feedback

Fr. John has created a Reopening Advisory Committee, which he chairs, supported by four subcommittees: Academic Reopening, Operations Reopening, Medical/Health, and Communications. We will co-chair the Academic Reopening subcommittee, which includes broad representation across the colleges, schools, and other academic functional areas. Fr. John has also established a [Faculty Advisory Committee](#) that reports directly to the Reopening Advisory Committee he chairs.

You may provide feedback and ideas through your department chairs, but we also welcome direct feedback. As you review the plans outlined above and that are distributed over the course of the summer and beyond, we encourage you to email provost@nd.edu with any concerns or suggestions for improvement. We are also developing plans for other venues and mechanisms for receiving input, including meeting with department chairs. Your insights and voices are critically important to us personally and to the entire University community if we are to achieve this ambitious goal that we have set for ourselves.

Concluding thoughts

Given the many unknowns we are facing, the key to success is to build resiliency and flexibility into our planning. We also will need to maintain open communication as conditions evolve over the summer, with additional guidance being provided along the way – and, candidly, almost certainly some adjustments to what we have laid out here. Of course, even as we plan for reopening, we are keeping a careful eye on how case rates are fluctuating both here in Michiana and in the many places where our community members have been living these past few months. The plans we have laid out may need to change. We all need to bring our most flexible and agile selves as we adjust to this new normal.

We thank you again for your outstanding efforts to conclude a successful Spring 2020 semester under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. We note with gratitude, but not surprise, that for almost every student level for almost every item on the CIF, including Intellectual Challenge, the past semester rated as high or higher than the average of the last five spring semesters. Truly, you inspire us.

To provide a little levity at the end of this long and serious email, here the Provost-Elect waves hello while wearing a Notre Dame-themed mask made by Nina Ansimova and Wieslawa Ruchniak, seamstresses at St. Michael's Laundry. Despite the challenges ahead of us, underneath that mask, she is smiling in great anticipation of meeting you and learning about your wonderful work.



We realize that we are asking all of you to do something that is really hard even as you have just finished an especially exhausting semester. The coming days and weeks may challenge us like never before. We ask that you work together, be kind to one another, and know that you and your loved ones are in our thoughts and prayers.

Yours in Notre Dame,

Thomas G. Burish
Provost

Marie Lynn Miranda
Provost-Elect