From: Adam Bradford  
Sent: Monday, August 10, 2020 3:59 PM  
To: gradmemos@isum.isu.edu  
Subject: Fall 2020 semester -- COVID Information

Dear Graduate Students,
In just over one week’s time, we will begin the fall 2020 semester. Clearly, the beginning of this particular semester will be unlike any we have experienced before, as concerns over the spread of COVID-19 – absent just one year ago – are now foremost in all our minds. I wanted to write to you today to make sure that you have received up to date information about our return to campus, and are aware of what interventions we have put into place to secure your safety, as well as what we are asking of you to ensure the health and well-being of all of those who are part of Bengal Nation. I would also like to address some persistent questions that I have heard from graduate students about the upcoming semester. As a result, this email is somewhat lengthy, but I do believe it contains valuable information that you will wish to know.

First, as you are now undoubtedly aware, we are returning to campus in what we are calling a “Hyflex” educational delivery model. I want you to know that we pursued this model because of the overwhelming feedback that we received from you, the students, about your desire for in-person classes. At the same time that we have tried to accommodate your desire for in-person educational experiences, your health and well-being is our paramount concern. Hence, we have implemented the below changes – which have been communicated previously but are included here as a comprehensive reminder:

i. An alternative academic calendar will be in place for Fall 2020. Students will not return to campus after Thanksgiving.

ii. All students, faculty, staff, and campus visitors are required to properly wear cloth or disposable face coverings while on our campuses including public spaces such as common areas, hallways, classrooms, research labs, etc. Face coverings must also be used outdoors when in the presence of other individuals. While you are working alone in a private space, vehicle, or outdoors where physical distancing is possible, you may remove your face covering. All students will receive a face covering, and distribution information will be emailed prior to the first day of classes.

iii. Physical distancing of six feet is expected for the campus community.

iv. Classroom and campus living spaces will be modified to allow for safe physical distancing.

v. Even the most carefully developed plans for fall semester have to be flexible. We do not know everything about the COVID-19 virus, and we all must be ready to adapt and make changes as the situation evolves. This could include an interruption that requires a period of distance-based instruction with little advance notice.

We also recognize that many of you have responsibilities as teaching or research assistants, and that you may have questions about how this role will be impacted by the current situation. Questions about how your TA/RA responsibilities should be handled in the current climate are best addressed at the department level, and your departmental faculty and administration have been working closely with our COVID Response team to design site and class specific protocols,
as needed. Again, your health and well-being are our top priority. While many of these protocols are specific to your particular assignment and will be addressed by your department, there are some general guidelines/resources to keep in mind, such as:

i. Teaching and Research Assistants in COVID-19 vulnerable populations are encouraged to self-identify and engage with their program directors in assessing remote work opportunities and other reasonable accommodations in order to provide a safer work environment.

ii. Mental health support for RAs and TAs during this time can be accessed through the University’s Counseling and Testing services (https://www.isu.edu/ctc/).

iii. As we adjust to our “new normal” operations, you can expect many differences from the non-pandemic workplace. Please review the Stage Four Employee Operations Guidelines, particularly pages 13 and 14, and discuss with your supervisor as necessary.

In addition to these interventions, many of which are articulated on the Roaring Back website available here (https://www.isu.edu/roaringback/), there are a number of specific concerns that I have heard repeatedly over the course of the summer months, such as:

1. **What will happen if I contract or am exposed to COVID and have to miss class and/or my teaching responsibilities? Will I be penalized for that absence? Will I lose my assistantship and tuition benefits?** The answer to this question is an unequivocal “no!” We have no desire to penalize students for either contracting this illness or acting responsibly if exposed. All classes that are conducted this semester will be recorded so that students can access them whether they are here in person or not. Furthermore, students who contract any illness that prevents them from successfully completing their coursework are encouraged to contact their professor and work out suitable alternative arrangements for completing the missed coursework. If students are ill to the point where continuing in their classes is not possible, they are encouraged to request a medical withdrawal (including tuition reimbursement) for the course/semester. If you do have TA or RA responsibilities, you should also contact your direct supervisor so staffing the now instructorless section can be addressed in your absence.

2. **What if I have a student in my classroom or lab section who refuses to wear a mask?** The university has provided all instructional faculty with a Face Covering Toolkit for Faculty to help you address this situation should it arise. Please access it here (https://www.isu.edu/media/top-level/coronavirus/Face-Coverings_Toolkit-for-Faculty.pdf)

3. **What will happen if the rate of spread and quantity of infected individuals on campus climbs? What are the university’s plans for moving to a distance-based delivery model?** The university’s COVID-19 response workgroup will be actively monitoring any appearances of the virus on campus, and working closely with internal leadership as well as local, regional, and national public health organizations, as needed, to make prudent decisions regarding the university’s operating model. We will operate with caution, informed by the best guidance that is available to us from public health partners. Again, given that this is a dynamic situation, we are asking faculty, staff, and students to be prepared to transition to a distance-based learning and working format quickly, if needed. The university is tracking and making public its operating stance on
the Operational Levels webpage of the Roaring Back site (available here https://www.isu.edu/roaringback/operational-levels/). This site contains detailed information about how the university will change how it operates as it responds to increasing or decreasing COVID numbers. It should be noted that at the “Yellow Level” all courses must begin preparations to move their course to a distance-based format, and faculty (including graduate student TAs/RAs) who are interested in pursuing the option of moving their courses to distance-based instruction can begin the process of working with their supervisor to do so. Distance-based delivery is required beginning at the “Orange Level” for all courses except those with approval from the COVID Health Committee to continue as face-to-face.

I recognize that several of you may have additional questions. Many of those questions can be answered by referencing the FAQ section of the Roaring Back website here (https://www.isu.edu/roaringback/faq/faculty-and-instruction-faqs/), and here (https://www.isu.edu/roaringback/faq/student-faqs/)

Finally, I would like to reiterate that we are all members of the University community, and as such, have a shared responsibility in limiting the spread of COVID-19 and protecting each other. We are all in this together, and we recognize each individual will have different opinions and comfort levels related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Differences are valid and appreciated. University guidelines have been developed based on current CDC, State of Idaho, health department, and American College Health Association (ACHA) recommendations, and will be updated as recommendations change. We will continue to make the best decisions we can based on the information that we have – with your health foremost in mind.

If you have any questions about any of the information contained in this email, I invite you to reach out to me directly. I am happy to address whatever concerns you may have.

Best,

Adam

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