



To: Pitt Johnstown Students
From: Dr. Jem Spectar, President
Date: June 30, 2020
Subject: Update on Fall Planning

As I write this memo, I hope you are finding time to enjoy the beautiful outdoors this time of year. At the same time, I am certain you are thinking about the upcoming fall semester, your courses, and your campus friends. The purpose of this memo is to update you on areas covered in previous communications, as well as other important information.

Working Groups at Pitt Johnstown

As you are aware, I appointed several Working Groups comprised of faculty and staff, and these groups have been meeting regularly via Zoom to plan for the fall semester. The Academic Life Working Group has been focused on how we can continue to provide a “high quality educational experience” for our students, despite challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The safety of the entire campus community is a primary concern, and we are working with the Facilities Working Group and others to ensure a safe learning environment for all. For more information about health and safety, please see <https://www.johnstown.pitt.edu/fall-2020-restart-planning>. The Housing, Dining, Health & Wellness Working Group and the Student Life, Student Services and Athletics Working Groups have been working on developing plans to safely serve our students and provide meaningful engagement opportunities to all students. The recommendations from these task forces are being finalized shortly and more information will be shared with you.

What Classes Will Look Like

At Pitt-Johnstown, our signature method of course delivery has always been the live “up-close-and-personal”, in-person interaction between faculty and students that is consistent with our mission and purpose. We know that is the preference of our faculty, students and staff. However, we have had to re-envision our instructional delivery options to accommodate changes brought about by the pandemic. The University has adopted an instructional delivery approach called *Flex@Pitt*, which leverages remote technologies as appropriate, and enables us to offer courses in a safe and de-densified manner. The focus of our approach is to ensure a live “classroom experience must be made available for students”—and faculty are encouraged to physically come to the classroom where possible. Where that is not possible, the faculty member is still responsible for designing and monitoring the live classroom experience. Under the *Flex@Pitt* model health and safety is a priority and neither faculty members nor students will be required to be in the classroom in person, if that compromises health and safety.

While our primary method of course delivery at Pitt-Johnstown remains in-person classroom instruction, courses may include in-person, remote, synchronous, and asynchronous components. Students will be able to take on-campus courses, while some students who wish to study remotely because of circumstances created by the pandemic will also be able to do so. The technologies we would implement will enable faculty to provide a similar learning experience to students regardless of location. Using the technology installed in the classrooms, faculty will interact with remote students as well as with onsite students, and slides and other course materials can be projected and viewed by all students. Should the instructor not be able to attend in-person in the classroom, there will be an approved facilitator in each classroom, to support instructional delivery and ensure a live experience. Facilitators may be other faculty members or graduate student teaching assistants or other appropriate support personnel.

Scheduling Revisions

In-person classes will begin at Pitt-Johnstown on Wednesday, August 19, and classes will be held on Labor Day, September 7. The schedule includes a “self-care” day on Wednesday, October 14, when no classes will be held. Monday, November 23, and Tuesday, November 24 will be reserved for in-person final exams, and in-person classes will end on Friday, November 20. While students will not return to campus following Thanksgiving Break, the week of November 30 through December 4 will be used for online final exams. The semester will end on Saturday, December 5.

To support our primary goal of in-person instruction in a safe environment, our Division Chairs and Schedulers have been working to make some adjustments to the fall schedule. While being cognizant of the need to maintain as much stability as possible in the existing course schedule, some classes will be moved in accordance with defined class size limits based on classroom square footage. This means that one or more of your classes may be moved to a space that will accommodate the enrollment. Because we have a limited number of larger classrooms needed to maintain recommended social distancing, we are planning to use non-traditional classroom spaces, including the Murtha Center, PPAC, Cambria Room, Heritage Hall, and Whalley Chapel. Our IT Department is working to install appropriate instructional technology in those newly-identified classroom spaces. Even though we are working to find and prepare spaces that will accommodate all students registered for your courses, it may be necessary in some cases to implement a “rotating cohort model,” in which students are divided into groups, with each group attending a portion of course sessions, perhaps on alternating days or as determined by the instructor. We are trying to minimize the use of a “rotating cohort model” by expanding the number of spaces on campus that can be used for classes, but it may be an acceptable approach for certain exceptional cases. As an example, students enrolled in lab courses may be divided into two groups, with each attending for half of the allotted course time. Pre-work can be completed remotely, so that in-person time can be used for actual hands-on experiments and other lab assignments.

Return to Campus Housing

We are excited to be welcoming back our resident students and are working to provide a smooth and de-densified move-in experience for all. Students will receive detailed instructions from the Housing & Dining Offices on the day and time that they will be assigned to move in to their Pitt-Johnstown residence facilities. We have worked very hard to provide each student and their family with enough time to comfortably move in to their home-away-from-home!

The operations in the residence facilities will be slightly altered to allow for social distancing and comfort. For example, students and guests will not be permitted into residence facilities that they do not reside in. We ask that all students cooperate with these new and temporary guidelines and community standards for the safety of our campus community.

We are also very excited to welcome our new Dining Partner, Chartwells Dining Group, to our campus. When you return you will see updates to our dining facilities and offerings as well as new menus and exciting food concepts. The dining experience will also be slightly altered, as all restaurants currently are, to provide for social distancing and safe dining on campus. However, we know that you will enjoy the new offerings as we all work through the temporary changes and precautions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More information on dining operations will be forthcoming.

Student Engagement and Activities

The President's Office, the Student Affairs Division, your Student Government Association and Programming Board are all dedicated to providing all students and student organizations with an excellent campus experience in the upcoming school year. We understand that our normal way of building our Mountain Cat community is in-person gatherings and events and our current environment is challenging. New offerings may include some smaller gatherings, some virtual offerings and other ways to engage our students.

All areas in Student Affairs have been working this summer to alter how student activities and events are held to be meaningful, impactful while safe. There will be a focus on outdoor activities and there is a dedicated group of campus-life staff working on developing an exciting program of outdoor entertainment, wellness activities and events. Some exciting examples would be live outdoor concerts, pickleball games, cornhole tournaments, outdoor exercise classes (yoga, tai-chi, etc.) and winter activities such as cross-country skiing. You will notice a large tent in University Square that will be the hub of these outdoor activities.

Rest of Summer

Thank you again for your patience as we refine plans for the fall semester. We have had two successful Academic Planning Days, with another scheduled for July 16, and we are excited to welcome our incoming freshmen and our returning upperclassmen.

We may not yet have precise answers to everything, but we are making excellent progress, and are confident that we will all be ready when the semester begins on August 19th. In the meantime, look for additional information in your email and the other Pitt-Johnstown social media outlets.

Embrace and enjoy your world!