

Dear Colleagues,

Let me begin by thanking you for your additional questions about maintaining educational excellence following the March 8 Rice Alert message regarding cancelled classes. Our primary goal is continuing to fulfill Rice's educational mission as fully as possible immediately following Spring Break, under any circumstances that might arise. Your thoughtful and engaged input is not only helpful, it's crucial to this process.

At this point, the situation on campus is stable and we have no new confirmed cases of the coronavirus in the Rice community. Right now, we're planning to resume classroom instruction after the spring break. Nevertheless, given the fluid nature of this unprecedented situation, we think the smart thing to do is to prepare for additional challenges in the future—just in case.

U.S. public health officials are now describing an evolving focus from containment to mitigation of COVID-19. This has implications for how we proceed. One of the primary tools in a mitigation strategy is social distancing. We are pursuing numerous social distancing strategies (such as restricting large gatherings; remote course delivery; and accommodations for at-risk individuals) consistent with ensuring academic integrity. We hope the combination of these strategies will be effective for our community in fulfillment of our mission for the remainder of the semester and beyond.

**Our challenge is that in a relatively short timeframe, we need to be able to deliver our rich on-campus approach to education in more complicated circumstances, and we must quickly become adaptable enough to reduce person-to-person transmission of the virus. Our goal is to make enough classes available through remote delivery to reduce the chances of spread of COVID-19 in our community -- and to become ready to fully convert to remote instruction with a few days' notice, if necessary.**

We took a break from classes this week largely so that the faculty, the departments, and the administration can undertake this preparation. We encourage any faculty members who can translate their coursework to remote education mode by March 23 to do so. Others can minimize unnecessary meetings by relying more on outside reading, writing, and studying, and continue preparing for a remote teaching mode. Some courses may not be readily adaptable to remote instruction, and those can continue in the standard meeting format as long as circumstances allow. You may decide to adopt a new syllabus to accommodate any changes.

In order to help you:

1. Faculty will be notified by March 11 if they have courses for which conversion to remote education is particularly urgent (those with more than 100 students or have students who have self-identified as being at increased risk for COVID-19, and therefore require accommodation).
2. If you are enthusiastic about establishing distance education and have special circumstances that require you expedite this approach (such as being at increased risk for COVID-19) please e-mail Caroline Levander ([clevande@rice.edu](mailto:clevande@rice.edu)).

3. Please direct all questions related to courses to be included, faculty concerns, and pedagogical questions to Caroline Levander ([clevande@rice.edu](mailto:clevande@rice.edu)). Questions regarding technology tools including Canvas, Zoom and Kaltura, should be directed to Klara Jelinkova ([klaraj@rice.edu](mailto:klaraj@rice.edu)). IT support questions should be directed to the Help Desk at 713-348-HELP (4357) or email [helpdesk@rice.edu](mailto:helpdesk@rice.edu).
4. We have formed a Working Group in collaboration with the Faculty Senate, which has Paul Padley, Mike Gustin, Jesus Vassallo, Jeff Fleischer, and Charles Geyer as members. Caroline Levander and Klara Jelinkova will convene this Working Group, and there will be staff support from Rice Online Learning and Information Technology as well as the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE).

Finally, let me clarify our instructional operations for this week. To ensure that we have consistency across the university, faculty should not assign exams, homework, or other deliverables due during the week of March 9-13. Faculty are free to assign homework that will be due upon return from Spring Break. In addition, faculty should not hold remote courses this week, except for the online MCS and MBA degrees.

Thanks, everyone, for your hard work and understanding during what's a difficult and evolving situation. As always, feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Seiichi Matsdua  
Interim Provost