

**Subject:** Message to Faculty from Provost Boehm

**Date:** Tuesday, April 14, 2020 at 2:17:05 PM Eastern Daylight Time

**From:** UofL Update,Service Account

**To:** UofL Update,Service Account

Dear Faculty Colleagues,

I hope you had a restful and restorative weekend, one that prepared you for the home stretch of this most unusual semester. We will survive as an institution, just as we have survived other recent existential threats: financial setbacks, lapses of leadership and threats to our accreditation. This crisis feels different: the pandemic is not of our own making but has impacted every institution of higher education in the nation, from elite privates to struggling community colleges. It has disrupted the teaching and research of every faculty member, threatened our health and the health of our students, curtailed travel, wreaked havoc on our budgets and isolated us physically from our students, our colleagues, our friends and our community partners.

Of course, many of our faculty and staff at the HSC are daily risking their own health in order to continue research into the novel coronavirus and to treat patients. Some faculty and staff on Belknap have turned their research efforts to helping to manufacture PPE, sanitizers and swabs. I continue to be extraordinarily proud to be a Cardinal, to be part of a community that has responded to the crisis with compassion, flexibility and creativity; I am also grateful for our faculty and staff's generosity and kindness to our students, many of whom are experiencing unimaginable food and housing insecurities and job losses (their own and those of their families). Paradoxically, self-isolation, while seemingly pushing us apart, actually reminds us how interdependent we are and how each individual's actions and choices impact the entire community.

The pandemic has also driven home the idea that the relationship between faculty and students is extraordinarily important to our university. UofL's inclusion—along with prestigious private schools like Harvard, Columbia and Vanderbilt—in the attached Vanity Fair article came about because our students contacted the publication to praise not only our decision to implement a pass/fail policy but also the compassion of our faculty in the midst of the pandemic. You have shown that you understand that students are more than just students (they are people with complicated lives), and you've revealed to them that you are also more than just professors.

I hope you are finding time to read the Chronicle of Higher Education these days, since there are so many excellent pieces that attempt to predict the impact of the pandemic on higher education's future. In one that is attached below ("How will the Pandemic Change Higher Ed"), Erin Bartram, in an excerpt called "Build it Better," makes this point: "The crisis has also revealed how good teaching is important, and how difficult it is. It takes work, expertise, flexibility, and support, and it's as much about building meaningful relationships as it is about delivering disciplinary content and skills. Does our graduate training reflect this? Our methods of evaluation? Our promotion-and-tenure guidelines? Our funding and recognition of the people who work in our IT departments, libraries, and teaching-and-learning centers? Good online teaching takes particular expertise, and we should not confuse what many of us are doing now with true online teaching." I've been thinking a great deal about these issues, as have many of you; it takes a different kind of work to design a true online course, and the tools we use to create valuable, engaging, and inspiring opportunities for our students to learn online will also be different than those we use to connect with students face-to-face. And we will need to

develop better methods of evaluating and valuing good teaching.

As we pivot from managing the current semester's crisis to planning our future—both summer, which will be here before we know it, and fall of 2020—there are still many uncertainties about the path of the pandemic. I've been asked many times, "When will you make a decision about fall classes?" I can only respond by saying that I don't have enough information to decide--yet. My hope is that we will open in fall with students on campus, and we are preparing to welcome them, house them and teach them face-to-face; I know that many of us miss being in a physical space with our students, and our students are anxious to get back on campus. We also recognize that the pandemic could continue into late summer or come back in late fall, so we could be doing something hybrid, perhaps beginning or ending the semester online, with students on campus early or late, and we are beginning to imagine what that might look like. A worst-case scenario (in my opinion) is that fall is entirely online, so we are also preparing for that but hoping it's not necessary. Please know that I am being honest when I say that we are planning for all three possibilities without having determined which will be necessary: we do not want to be caught unprepared again.

What this "uncertainty" certainly means, however, is that as a faculty member, you too need to be preparing for the possibility of teaching part or all of your courses online in the fall, and if you are teaching this summer, you should already be planning for your online course. Gale Rhodes and the Delphi Center have been working tirelessly with representatives from your units to develop online training you can take from your home, to provide course designers to help you develop the particular expertise for true online teaching, and to recruit your colleagues with more experience to mentor you. You did what you needed to do this spring to teach your courses remotely, and I am extraordinarily grateful. But we know, as Bartram suggests, that recording lectures or holding Zoom or Microsoft synchronous sessions is not sufficient to ensure a great experience for our students. So I am urging you to avail yourself of the opportunities the Delphi Center is providing to develop online skills. Whatever the future holds for us as an institution, I believe online learning will continue to be important for a segment of our students, and we must meet them where they are. We will all be better prepared by choosing to develop these skills now.

I also believe we have to learn from this semester and be better prepared for future disruptions to our working lives. My daughter graduated last spring from the University of South Carolina, and during her first fall, as a hurricane threatened, parents were told, "Columbia is inland, we never get hit by hurricanes." As the campus experienced record flooding from the hurricane, students were trapped for four or five days until the waters receded enough to allow them to leave the city and return home while dorms and classrooms were cleaned and restored. "It's a hundred-year storm," we were told. Two of the following three years, my daughter was sent home in the fall due to hurricane storms and severe flooding; there were three "hundred-year storms" in four years. Her university was much better prepared for the second and third storms, and I plan on being better prepared for whatever comes our way next time. I am asking you to also prepare to be a better online teacher, to be intentional and thoughtful as you design your courses for summer and fall. And again, I recognize that preparing and planning is time-consuming, but I know you will be a better teacher both online and face-to-face if you take this time to think about what your students need from you in the online environment—just as you have thought about what they need from you in this strange semester of the corona virus—the semester with an asterisk as I have called it.

Thank you again for all you do for our students, and be sure to thank our staff colleagues who have advised our students, fed them and cleaned the buildings, kept our IT operational and our basic

business operations functional; thank everyone who has supported your work this semester. As I said earlier, the pandemic has shown us how much we depend on each other to do the right things.

I hope you have some time as the semester ends to read some of the material in the links below. But more importantly, I hope you take some time to take a walk, read a book, play with your children, cook a wonderful meal—whatever will help you stay healthy.

Best,

Beth

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/On-a-Desert-Island-With/248452?cid=wcontentgrid>

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Will-the-Pandemic-Change/248474?cid=RCPACKAGE>

[https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Ensure-a-Successful/248424?utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en&utm\\_source=Iterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=campaign\\_1124554&cid=at&source=ams&sourceId=358403](https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Ensure-a-Successful/248424?utm_source=at&utm_medium=en&utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_1124554&cid=at&source=ams&sourceId=358403)

<https://insight.councilonpostsecondaryeducation.org/campuses-adopting-pass-fail-policies-to-limit-coronavirus-impact-on-grades/>

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2020/03/coronavirus-upending-life-grades-college-students>

<https://louisville.edu/coronavirus/assets/instructional-design-support>