

Dear South Texas community,

We find ourselves at the end of March, and what a March it has been. I was an English major at U.Va., and loved T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and its famous (infamous?) first line: "April is the cruellest month." Let us pray that our aggressive social distancing will prove the lie to Eliot.

There are several updates (11!) today, so please read through everything below:

1. We will need to postpone or adjust the Commencement ceremony, currently scheduled for May 17. As you can imagine, this is not a decision we wanted to make. Given everything we know today, however, it seems very unlikely that we will be able to hold a large gathering in mid-May.

As you know, some area colleges have cancelled their commencement programs; others have postponed them; still others have moved to a virtual commencement ceremony. Commencement, more than anything, is an opportunity for students and their loved ones to celebrate, and we will not make a decision about how to hold Commencement without your input. In the next few days, we will circulate a survey to all graduating students asking them to rank order their preferred method(s) of holding Commencement. Options for a delayed Commencement will include provisions that the ceremony would be held after a July (or fall) bar exam so that students do not have to worry about losing time studying for the exam.

Your input on this topic will be invaluable as we determine the best way for our graduates to celebrate their accomplishments at South Texas. We will not make any decisions about commencement without student involvement.

2. All South Texas-sponsored or -hosted events through April 26 are cancelled. This extension, from April 5, is consistent with guidance from the CDC and the White House. This, unfortunately, includes the Honors Program, which was scheduled for April 24. All Honors still will be awarded, and we will figure out a way to celebrate everyone's accomplishments.

3. All South Texas-sponsored or -funded travel through April 26 similarly is cancelled. Again, this extension, from April 5, is consistent with the guidance on how to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

4. Pursuant to the Stay-at-Home Order issued by Harris County Judge Hidalgo, there is no access to the building for students this week. We know that some students would like access to campus to get materials or to use the printers, but the Order's definition of essential operations does not make provisions for students coming to school. We worked through our local organizations to find exceptions to the order's prohibitions; regrettably, there aren't any.

5. We will make a decision on when the building can be reopened to our community later this week after we have an opportunity to review County Judge Hidalgo's extension of her Stay-at-Home order. Our goal is to allow access to campus as soon as we are allowed to do so.

6. Please register all travel outside of the Houston area (or changes in travel plans) at www.stcl.edu/travel. Please do so, particularly if any of the following apply to you: (1) If you have traveled and have not registered that travel; or (2) If you registered travel, but then changed your plans. One of the best ways to protect our community is to know where everyone has been.

7. Please let us know if you or a member of your household (1) have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or (2) have been exhibiting the symptoms of COVID-19 but are unable to obtain a test. Please do so here: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?STCLHouston&layout_id=19. We want to make sure that we are supporting you during this challenging time, and we can do that best if we know who is affected by the illness.

8. Our Financial Aid office is working on a summary of the CARES Act -- and how it applies to our students. As soon as that is finished, I will share it with you.

9. Speaking of Financial Aid, please see below my signature an appeal that was sent to all of our alumni late last week. I am pleased to report that our alumni have stepped up, and the fund already has received some \$8,000 in donations. Financial Aid is preparing information on sources of funding for those facing emergency financial issues, as well as the process for applying for these sources. As soon as it is finished, I will share it with you.

10. We are developing processes for exams in an ever-changing world. I know that some have asked about the processes for exams. Please know that we are developing processes for exams in various scenarios -- on campus, remote, and hybrid approaches (remote, as well as on campus for those who want). There are processes being developed, as well, to ensure exam integrity and to address other issues regarding exams.

11. Final thought: Please do your part to limit the spread of coronavirus. My mom turns 78 next month and is on a slew of medicines; she is among those who is vulnerable to the coronavirus -- and one of those who, if she were exposed to it, likely would become one of the fatality statistics. There are many, many like her; I expect each of us has family members and loved ones who are at heightened risk. The part of this illness that is most unsettling is the fact that carriers may be asymptomatic -- that is, you can feel just fine and still be spreading the illness to others. The best way to limit the spread is to maintain social distancing. Please do your part.

I know it can be challenging to maintain balance these days. (That's one reason I look at news or social media only twice a day; it's enough to keep up with everything going on without becoming overwhelmed.) Please know that all of us at South Texas -- faculty, staff, and administration -- care about our students and are doing everything we can to make sure that the best interests of our students are front and center in every decision we make.

Please continue staying safe.

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