I understand that there have been a few questions about using the ReturnSafe App. I wanted to explain why we are using it.

1. We know that we can have a successful semester remotely. In fact, many schools are not opening at all this fall – either because of state and local orders or because of school decisions.

2. Schools that are opening are instituting a variety of protocols – from COVID-19 testing before students come to class to contact-tracing apps to prohibitions on activities that students can engage in on- and off-campus.

3. Health and safety of the members of our community will remain our top priority. We all owe a commitment to each other to take actions – both on- and off-campus – that will keep everyone safe.

4. The coronavirus pandemic remains significant – particularly in South Texas. While cases are declining in recent weeks, we are far from out of the woods. And, most experts predict that there will be a resurgence of cases in the fall. With 553,000 confirmed cases in Texas so far, at least 1 in every 52 Texans either has had the illness or is currently ill.

5. The Harris County Judge has directed that primary and secondary schools remain closed until at least September. While this order doesn't apply to us, we should open campus only if we can address the concerns that led to the County Judge's order.

Meeting Students' Expectations:

6. Many students indicated on the survey we sent this summer that they would prefer online-only classes this semester. We have accommodated those students, and all students who cannot come to campus for any reason related to the coronavirus may take any and all of their classes online.

7. However, many students indicated on the survey that they prefer to have campus open – either because they prefer in-person classes or because they desire access to a quiet place to study, stronger internet, or just a break from their apartment or home. We want to accommodate those students as well.

Balancing the Interests:

8. For us to open campus, we have to do so in a way that is responsible and that minimizes the risk of community transmission of coronavirus. To that end, we cannot and will not open campus unless we can satisfy all of the following:

   a. We have established clear safe distancing practices for use throughout campus, including use of facial coverings, availability of hand sanitizer, and mechanisms to ensure that community members can maintain a safe distance at all times;
   b. We have adjusted the infrastructure within campus to meet safe distancing standards;
   c. We have established a method to reduce the likelihood of an individual coming to campus while infected with COVID-19 – with or without symptoms; and
   d. We have established a method to contact trace in case a member of our community later is diagnosed with COVID-19.

   We have taken care of (a) and (b). The ReturnSafe App addresses (c) and (d).

9. Why do we need to contact trace? Quite simply: to increase the likelihood that we can keep the school open. With a vaccine months away, it is inevitable that one or more members of our community will be diagnosed with COVID-19 at some point this year.

   Without contact tracing, when that diagnosis is made, if we don't know with whom that infected individual has come into contact, we would have to consider closing the entire campus. As a result, very likely, campus would be closed for a significant portion of the year.

   With contact tracing, however we will be able to identify the people who were in contact with that individual, and only that limited group would have to quarantine. The rest of campus can remain open.

10. We reviewed several different methods of addressing 8(c) and (d) – including manual processes and other technology apps. We chose ReturnSafe because it had the best features and was the least invasive option.

    a. The screening questions are based on questions being used at medical facilities, schools, businesses, and government agencies across the country.
    b. The app is geofenced – which means that it identifies other phones with which it comes in contact **only** when the phone's owner is on campus.
    c. The app does not track activity outside of campus.
    d. The app does not track your activity on campus, either.
    e. If a member of the community has a positive diagnosis, the owners of phones that have been near to that individual for an extended period of time will receive an **anonymous** notice that there may have been exposure to coronavirus – **no names or identities will be revealed to either party**.
    f. Identifying information will be shared only with a limited group of South Texas leaders.
    g. The app is relatively easy to use and allows South Texas to capture all information on coronavirus exposures in one location.
    h. The app does not track any other use of the phone, any browsing, any searches, etc. – and is significantly less invasive than any social media app and most other apps on the market.
    i. Instructions for downloading ReturnSafe can be found at this link.

Conclusion:

11. We can open campus only if we can do so in a way that is responsible.

12. The alternative to an app like ReturnSafe is to close campus.

13. Every student, faculty member, and staff member who owns a smartphone will be expected to use the ReturnSafe app and to leave Bluetooth functioning while on campus.

14. If a student prefers not to use the ReturnSafe app, that is absolutely fine. The student may take all of his or her classes online.