

Dear STCL Houston Community:

Happy New Year! I hope you had a restful and restorative winter break.

As we eagerly welcome the start of 2021, I'd like to provide you with an update on the school's health and safety protocols and our plans for the upcoming orientation, winter intercession, and spring courses.

While the unprecedented 2020 is in our rearview mirror, its ramifications — unfortunately — continue to linger. Our law school's Emergency Operations Management Team (EOMT) (which has representatives of the faculty, staff, student, and outside communities) continues to meet regularly to assess the health threat, both to the Houston region and to our own internal South Texas family. The EOMT met this past Wednesday to discuss and prioritize the following issues:

- **COVID-19 remains a significant health concern.**

As you are aware, COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Houston (and throughout Texas) persist at dangerously high levels. ICU beds are filling up, and the positivity rate has hit new highs. And a new coronavirus variant appears to be gaining a foothold in the U.S. Working closely with Harris County Public Health (HCPH), our EOMT daily monitors the region's incidence of positive coronavirus cases and seeks advice from medical experts regarding our school's operations. For updated COVID-19 information in the region, follow [HCPH's dedicated COVID-19 webpage here](#).

- **Your behavior matters.**

COVID-19 is a widespread public health concern — but it is strongly impacted by **individual** behavior and decisions. Wearing facial coverings when outside of your home, committing to social distancing, and maintaining a passion for protecting health — both of yourself and of others — remain key priorities in the battle against coronavirus.

Also paramount is the need to quarantine when in doubt about potential COVID-19 exposure or infection, particularly given the new mutated virus that is beginning to get a foothold in the U.S.

It really is simple: Unless you have consistently followed CDC guidelines (social distancing, facemasks in public, limiting interactions outside your immediate household, etc.), please do not come to campus. Thus, for example, if you or members of your immediate household celebrated Christmas or New Year's Eve in public or with individuals outside of your immediate household, you should not come to campus for 14 days from that exposure.

Please continue to follow the school's protocols regarding the need for self-quarantine, [outlined on the STCL Houston website here](#). Stay home if (1) you have tested positive for COVID-19; (2) you have been exposed to an individual with COVID-19; (3) you have a fever; (4) you have COVID-19 symptoms; and/or (5) you have not consistently followed CDC guidance.

- **Current plans for orientation, winter intercession, and spring courses remain in place — although this is, of course, subject to change.**

We plan to offer both virtual and in-person classes as we begin the spring 2021 semester (including intersession courses). As in fall 2020, any student who cannot attend classes for a reason related to COVID-19 may attend classes remotely.

In addition, the new 1L student orientation for our new spring students — scheduled for January 6-8 — also will be offered in a hybrid format. For those who have elected to attend orientation in person, the sessions on January 6 and January 8 will be on campus. Events on January 7 will be held online.

We are very closely monitoring the news in Houston. We will let you know immediately if these plans change.

Please review STCL Houston's COVID-19 safety protocols at www.stcl.edu/health.

Of note, please continue to practice good hygiene, including frequent hand washing, avoiding contact with those at risk of exposure or infection, and staying home when you are sick.

Because of our stringent safety protocols and our community's commitment to prioritizing health, our South Texas family has been minimally impacted by the coronavirus. Please maintain this focus as we begin the spring semester. Remember, if you elected to attend a course in person, you have the option of attending class online if you feel ill or believe you may have been exposed to the coronavirus. Please inform your professor if you will be attending a class virtually rather than in person.

As a reminder, you must report potential COVID-19 exposure or infection — as soon as two or more symptoms appear — through the ReturnSafe app. Those without smartphones are required to self-report potential exposure or infection via email to health@stcl.edu. That way we can provide you the resources you need and protect our community.

Please direct any questions regarding the coronavirus or the school's COVID-19 safety protocols to health@stcl.edu.

I have been so impressed by how our community has responded to the coronavirus pandemic – and I remain optimistic about the future. That optimism is based on the fact that I trust you, our South Texas community, to do the right thing for each other.

We all are in this together. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to the health and safety of our community. I look forward to a safe, healthy, and productive spring 2021 semester.

All the best, and be safe!

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