

Dear STCL Houston Community,

Since the outset of the coronavirus pandemic last spring, protecting the health and well-being of the South Texas family has been our top priority. I also committed that I would be transparent and communicate with you in real time about the coronavirus and its implications for our school.

In that vein, the school's Emergency Operations Management Team (EOMT) met this afternoon, and we decided that we will hold all classes online for the first two partial-weeks of the year. Specifically, the classes for this part-week (beginning Wednesday-Saturday, January 13-16) and the holiday-shortened following week (Tuesday-Saturday, January 19-23) will be delivered online only, and not in the hybrid format.

We don't make this decision lightly. It is prompted by several factors, the most significant of which is that our case count has increased dramatically in the last week – from 1 or 2 confirmed cases per week throughout the fall to 14 last week, with more confirmed cases coming in over the weekend.

We are aware that case counts, the numbers of deaths, and the positivity rate are at record highs across the nation and in the region. There also are new coronavirus variants (the UK variant, which already is in Houston; and the South African variant, which our medical advisors tell us may not respond as well to medical treatment) that appear to be more easily transmissible. In addition, Rice and UT and other schools have made the same decision. And all expectations are that the number of cases will increase in the coming days due to transmission that took place on New Year's Eve and over the following weekend.

But most significant to us is that we have more cases in our South Texas community. We cannot become a vector for the spread of the virus, particularly given that so many of our community are at increased risks relating to Covid-19.

So that we can resume in-person, hybrid education as soon as feasible,

- 1. Please strictly follow CDC protocols over the next two weeks (and thereafter); and**
- 2. Please ensure that, if you have a positive test for Covid-19 or if you have symptoms of Covid-19, you let us know immediately through the ReturnSafe app or via email to health@stcl.edu.**

Although all classes will be online, **campus will remain open** for students, faculty, and staff – and all safety protocols will be strictly enforced.

The EOMT will meet again next Wednesday, January 20, to determine whether we can resume hybrid classes on Monday, January 25. Watch for an email from me by close of business on January 20. And if there are any additional developments between now and then, I will communicate with you immediately.

All of us recognize that the online-only methodology is an inconvenience for some, and I regret that we need to take this step so early in the spring 2021 semester. If you need any assistance, as before, our hard-working community stands ready to assist you as the school transitions to all-online instruction.

As a reminder, you can find the school's most current COVID-19 updates, along with a dedicated FAQ, on the STCL Houston website at www.stcl.edu/health. And send any questions related to COVID-19 to health@stcl.edu.

Thank you for your flexibility and understanding. We will continue to do what we need to do to protect the health and safety of our South Texas family. **And that protection starts with each of you.** We remain in this together.

All the best, and be safe,

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