

March 12, 2020

Dear SOC Colleagues,

In the last 24 hours, we have been awash in new information about MSU and beyond. Please allow me to summarize and highlight those key points that likely have the greatest impact on our day-to-day work.

Some of this will be brief highlights of what you may already have read in Wednesday's e-mails from President Stanley, Graduate Dean Jeitschko, and Interim Provost Sullivan. Other aspects will be information from Wednesday's emergency College Chairs and Directors meeting. Of course, much of this is simply what we know *now*, which may evolve in the near future as conditions change.

### Teaching and Learning

1. **As of noon Wednesday, all face-to-face instruction was suspended.** This will last at least until Monday April 20, but most likely will last until the end of the semester.

A. **We should think of this not as “online teaching” but as extending our instruction to facilitate remote access (“remote instruction”).** (“Online teaching” really refers to courses that are designed and administered wholly online.) Nevertheless, nearly all instructors of brick-and-mortar courses already use e-mail to communicate with students and use D2L for assignment submission, archiving course materials, running discussion boards, maintaining a gradebook, etc. The major change from Wednesday on is that our in-class activities will now need to be fully accessible via remote access and our office hours will be held virtually.

B. This exogenous shock provides a novel opportunity for us all to return to first principles. That is, what are the major learning outcomes/objectives for our course? Given this new situation, what is the best way forward to help students achieve these learning outcomes/objectives? **These two questions should guide your pedagogical decisions about how to adapt what was your face-to-face instruction.**

C. **We trust instructors to use their expert judgement and professional discretion to figure out the most effective ways forward with their assigned courses.** If any instructors have questions about what they could/should do, please let me know. Here are just a few guiding principles and/or rules:



1. *General Guideline: It is ok to cancel “course sessions” for the remainder of this week*, so you can use this time to transition your face-to-face instruction to allow remote/online access. Be sure to communicate this to your students.
2. *Rule: Any synchronous activities* (i.e., students doing something at the same time in real time), **then it must be held within the normal meeting times of your course** (e.g., you could continue to hold regularly scheduled class sessions but with the class lecture/discussion over Zoom instead of in the classroom).
3. *Rule: You must continue to hold your regularly scheduled office hours* via Zoom, skype, chat, etc. Make sure to remind your students that they may contact you when your office hours are scheduled for a real-time discussion.
4. *General Guideline: For the rest of this semester, we should give students the benefit of the doubt, assume they are telling us the truth, and simply be generous.* If students tell you that they are having technical problems, connectivity issues, didn't get your e-mail, have a scheduling problem, misread the deadline of an assignment, etc., given them the benefit of the doubt. Realistically, you will not have the time/energy required to confirm all or most of the claims that students will make anyway.

2. **MSU is offering assistance for instructors for transitioning their courses for remote access.**

- A. [keepteaching.msu.edu](http://keepteaching.msu.edu) is a **self-service clearinghouse of resources for instructors.**
- B. MSU (largely through the Hub for Innovation in Learning and Technology) is setting up a **one-on-one service for instructors who need more guidance.** The Hub staff is not sufficiently large for this, so they are asking for instructors who are adept at integrating information technology into courses to volunteer to help others. The Hub will use a triage system to determine the order of assistance (i.e., highest priorities are for instructors with large courses and instructors with a large number of graduating seniors).
- C. MSU has **increased our server capacity** (to anticipate much greater use of D2L, MediaSpace, etc.).
- D. **If instructors post recorded lectures onto D2L, then they should make sure that each video file is adequately close-captioned** (to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act). The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education is setting up a special fund to help cover these additional costs of close-captioning.

1. **MSU Web Accessibility (<https://webaccess.msu.edu/Tutorials/>) identifies a few options for close-captioning** (e.g., Kaltura MediaSpace). An alternative (and free) way to close-caption a lecture (if you are speaking over a PowerPoint) is via the Spartan 365 online version of PowerPoint. This version has built-in voice-over and close-captioning.
  
3. **As of now, with the exception of Level 3 CDC Warning countries (avoid non-essential travel) all other summer MSU Education Away/Abroad Programs are still scheduled to proceed.**

#### **A Message from Interim Provost Sullivan**

It's essential to plan for course adjustments and communication in order to ensure a smooth transition into the remote learning space.

**Adjust your expectations for students:** You may need to adjust some of your expectations for students, including participation, engagement, grading, and deadlines. As you think through these changes, keep in mind the effect that a campus disruption may have on students' ability to meet those expectations. Students may encounter additional barriers, which you should be mindful of. These include illness, lacking power or internet connections, or needing to care for family members. Be ready to handle requests for extensions or accommodations equitably.

**Some students rely on MSU's infrastructure for internet access.** Should access to campus be restricted it is possible that some students may have limited internet connectivity or be reliant on cellular networks for their internet access.

**Develop a communication plan:** It's important that you develop a robust communication plan. Clarify your modified expectations and course elements and communicate them to students. Tell students how they can contact you (email, online office hours, Microsoft Teams, etc.), and how soon they can expect a reply from you. Consider using the D2L announcements and discussion board tools to push out course-level communications.

**Consider realistic goals for continuing instruction:** Be realistic about what can and cannot be accomplished in a remote environment. Refocus the course goals on realistically attainable objectives. Clarify what your expectations are for students' efforts with regard to reading and homework. Be clear with students what you expect of them with regard to participation and online discussion.

**Adjust your syllabus as needed:** Clarify what policies (attendance, participation, grading, schedule) will need to be altered for the duration of the remote delivery. Provide as much detail as possible about changes. Do not expect students to participate in synchronous sessions at a time other than the normal course time.

## Office Staff and Student Employees

3. **Departments, offices, and other units remain open as usual, and university employees are expected to continue working as they normally would.** This applies to unit administrators, faculty, office staff, advisors, GTAs, ULAs, and other student employees.
  - A. In particular, **office staff should report to their regular workspace until/unless further notice.** (If/When local school districts suspend operations and/or MSU implement modified operations, some employees may work remotely as appropriate.) In the near future, <https://keepworking.msu.edu/> will go live as a resource to facilitate a transition to working remotely.
  - B. **GTAs should work with their direct supervisor to coordinate on the most appropriate and effective ways to continue performing their work in their assigned course.** Given the suspension of face-to-face instruction, GTAs may primarily help instructors transition the course more fully onto D2L for remote access. Instructors have the discretion to allow their GTA to remotely complete their work for the rest of the semester. Instructors should closely monitor the work hours of their GTA so the latter do not surpass 20 hours of work per week.
4. **Faculty are expected to continue teaching courses (as assigned), conducting research (for tenure-system faculty only), and performing service.** Department committees should continue their work on existing matters and ongoing projects, though this likely may be done via e-mail, Zoom, and/or OneDrive (i.e., on Spartan 365).

## Gatherings and Meetings

5. **MSU has specifically cancelled all gatherings of over 100 people. All smaller gatherings are at our own discretion (as long as we practice social distancing).**
6. **In SOC, we are cancelling all in-person department meetings, job talks, symposia, and brownbags for the remainder of the semester.** This is largely because none of these are likely to be determined “essential” or “urgent.” In lieu of department meetings, the Chair will continue to provide the department with detailed updates and information typically included in meeting agendas.
  - A. The one likely exception to this may be the next two FAC meetings to discuss the annual reviews of all tenure-system faculty.

- B. Most likely, **we will conduct the interview of Lindsey Wilkinson** (the sole finalist being considered for our Associate Professor of Sociology in SGM Health position) **virtually by the end of this semester or in-person at the beginning of the fall semester.**
- C. **We will not hold our Departmental Research Symposium and Awards Reception in April.**
- D. For the remainder of the spring semester, **we may conduct any qualifying paper presentations, dissertation proposal defenses, and dissertation defenses virtually via Zoom.**
- E. **Our annual review meetings with the Chair—tentatively scheduled for the last few weeks of April—likely will be cancelled.**

### **Travel**

- 7. **All university-related international travel is suspended until April 20.** This includes new travel as well as any currently booked trips between now and April 20.
- 8. **All university-related non-essential domestic travel is suspended until April 20,** with some possible exceptions. To request an exception, the potential traveler should submit to the Chair a 3-4 sentence description of the proposed upcoming domestic travel. Interim Provost Sullivan will review all possible exceptions on a case-by-case basis. Types of university-related domestic travel requests most likely to receive an exception are:
  - A. trips within Michigan
  - B. trips that only involve driving (and no plane flight); and
  - C. trips that don't involve going to a large gathering.
- 9. **For the rest of this semester, SOC will not allocate any GOF conference travel funds or GOF dissertation funds that involve air travel.**

Sincerely,



Aaron M. McCright, Ph.D.

Professor and Chairperson  
Department of Sociology  
Michigan State University  
mccright@msu.edu