



The State University
of New York

Office of the Chancellor

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Message from Chancellor Kristina M. Johnson

At this difficult time, I want to take a moment to update you on our ongoing efforts to combat the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The health and safety of our State University of New York Community is paramount. Therefore, in close coordination with the Governor and his team, the Department of Health and the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, we are taking action to reduce the density of exposure on our campuses in order to blunt transmission of this virus.

As you know, SUNY will be moving as many academic programs as possible to distance learning via our online platform, videoconferencing, teleconferencing, email and even traditional mail. We believe that these remote instruction modalities are necessary at this time to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Our SUNY COVID-19 Task Force has been working around the clock with campus leaders and our state government partners to prepare for and respond to the growing pandemic. While the large majority of our campuses have not reported confirmed cases of the virus, we are acting out of an abundance of caution to both protect our SUNY community and the community at large.

We canceled all study abroad programs for the rest of the semester and last week transported our students back to the United States from China, South Korea, Japan, Italy and Iran – all countries where COVID-19 is prevalent. Once the students returned, we arranged for several precautionary quarantine scenarios. Some students voluntarily quarantined at home, while others are undergoing a 14-day precautionary quarantine in specially prepared dorms.

We are now working to bring back all students who are studying abroad, regardless of the country in which they are located – a move I believe is prudent and in keeping with our main goal of limiting COVID-19 exposure to our students, faculty and staff.

Fortunately, we have been working for the last year to upgrade and modernize our online SUNY learning platform. Working with the Governor's office, we directed each of our campuses to develop comprehensive plans for distance learning with the goal of continuing academic instruction, uninterrupted, in the safest manner possible.

Next week is spring break for most of SUNY's university centers, comprehensive, technical and community colleges. The Governor's guidance allows for campuses to extend their spring break by a week, in order to fully prepare for the transition to distance learning and remote instruction. Some campuses are ready to launch and therefore will not require a full week. By March 19, we will have our plans in place and be able to transition as many courses as possible online. Please consult with your individual campus regarding this revised academic schedule.

Campuses will make their distance learning curriculum available to all students. We recognize, as does the Governor, that some students will need to remain on campus for special circumstances, such as housing needs, employment responsibilities, and to fulfill coursework that requires hands-on instruction or laboratory work. We will make sure their learning environment is safe.

Therefore, many campus dormitories, dining halls and other facilities will remain open for the duration of the semester, until further notice. We will offer students the choice to return to campus. However, if they either choose not to return or are unable to do so, we will do whatever it takes to ensure they can fulfill and complete their academic requirements remotely. We are working quickly to resolve the financial impact remote instruction and distance learning will have on a student's account.

In a system with 1.2 million students we understand that one size will not fit all. We will work to find solutions – on a case-by-case basis, if necessary – to ensure that every student can continue their education and complete their coursework to the extent possible.

This global public health crisis has resulted in dozens of new confirmed COVID-19 cases across the state daily. We have thus far confirmed cases of students with COVID19 at three campuses and have followed all local and state guidance to protect these campus communities.

I understand this situation is causing tremendous anxiety among students and their families, as well as our faculty and staff. Do know that the COVID-19 is a fragile but virulent virus. However, public health experts have repeatedly stressed that the best way to protect yourself against this virus is to wash your hands thoroughly and frequently, avoid touching your face, disinfect surfaces that may be contaminated and stay home if you are feeling sick.

In order to maintain our calm and to reduce anxiety that has arisen as a result of this outbreak, we will continue to keep our lines of communication open and to provide accurate information in a responsible manner. I am committed to keeping you as up to date as possible. I am confident that by working together we can overcome this ever-changing crisis and emerge stronger with important lessons learned that we can apply to strengthen our system in the future.

I thank you for your cooperation and willingness to follow the advice provided by public health experts who are working to keep COVID-19 from spreading. Rest assured that SUNY and our campus leaders will continue to monitor this situation, keep you apprised of changes and developments as they occur and answer any questions and concerns you may have.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristina M. Johnson', written in a cursive style.

Kristina M. Johnson, PhD.
Chancellor, State University of New York