Faculty Town Hall

Thursday, July 9, 2020

12:00-1:30pm

A group of faculty including Suzanne Sindi, Erica Rutter, and Shilpa Khatri are conducting mathematical contact tracing models. Professor Sindi has also been working with Dr. Thelma Hurd on a public health work group.

EVC/Provost Camfield announced that per recent communications to the campus, in-person instruction will be significantly reduced in favor of online instruction due to the rise in coronavirus cases. The courses that will be offered in-person are those that by their nature can only be offered physically (e.g. lab courses). EVC/Provost Camfield acknowledged that many students have reported difficulties in online instruction due to insufficient technology and lack of sufficient remote study space.

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued new rules for F-1 and M-1 visa holders. This action may impact a significant number of our graduate students. A memo regarding this action was sent to graduate group chairs and deans from the current and incoming Graduate Council chairs and interim VPDGE Kello. Incoming Graduate Council Chair Hratchian stated that the ICE rule appears to be mainly targeting undergraduate students. He and current Graduate Council Chair Westerling will be meeting with appropriate staff tomorrow; in the meantime, faculty are advised not to take any action at this time until more information is received.

EVC/Provost Camfield introduced new VPDUE Sarah Frey.

SNS Dean Dumont reported that the educational resiliency group and its subgroups continue their work.

A faculty member inquired about the Library. Director of Space Planning & Analysis Maggie Saunders responded that the Library will open in August but a specific date has not yet been established.

In response to a faculty member’s question, EVC/Provost Camfield confirmed that campus buildings have very high filtration standards and should not contribute to viral spread. Director Saunders added that all air handlers have been cleaned. EVC/Provost Camfield stated that the campus will be addressing the disinfecting of classrooms. The telecommuting agreement for staff will be extended through fall semester 2020 in order to reduce the density on campus.

When discussing the creation of learning dens for students, EVC/Provost Camfield stated that the dens will require residential assistance support but will also have online assistance. He added that the focus next semester will be on reallocation, i.e. staff who may not be needed in their current positions may be reallocated to positions related to the research enterprise.

SNS Dean Dumont stated that resources will be available for faculty on best practices for online and remote resources.

In response to a faculty member inquiring about lab courses, SNS Dean Dumont answered that any components of the courses that cannot be handled remotely can be offered in-person. However, faculty are encouraged to transfer all other components of the courses to remote instruction. She also stated that the number of students allowed in labs will be about half the typical number. The campus will continue to supply the standard PPE that has always been provided for students in labs, but the campus will have to develop lab cleaning protocols.

CIO Ann Kovalchick stated that there are three types of remote labs:

1. Remote using RDP to the physical labs on campus that IT currently supports
2. Access to a virtual lab image that students can access on their desktop
3. Amazon app screen.

CIO Kovalchick confirmed that the campus will offer all options by mid-August but will conduct testing prior to the release date. She added that she submitted to campus leadership a budget for wireless for outdoor spaces. This proposal includes different cost levels. She asked faculty to contact her if they require details. She stated that Deans have decided that the campus should not invest in a centralized function for proctored exams. CIO Kovalchick ended her update with a reminder that each Wednesday, her office issues their continuity newsletter which contain updates on technology tools.

A faculty member pointed out that he has had to purchase office equipment for use in his home and asked whether he can be reimbursed by campus funds. EVC/Provost Camfield stated that he would support such a reimbursement.

A faculty member pointed out that the campus may still offer remote instruction in spring 2021 depending on the future of COVID-19 cases. She asked whether the campus is planning on evaluating how effective remote delivery was in spring, summer, and fall 2020. Some technologies necessary to deliver high quality remote instruction but there is a cost issue. SNS Dean Dumont responded that the educational resiliency work group is looking at what data they need to gather in order to track the long-term effectiveness of remote instruction. She asked faculty to contact her if they have input on this.