



MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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To: Montana Board of Regents; Montana University System Chief Executive Officers;
Montana Community College Presidents; Governor Steve Bullock

From: Clayton T. Christian, Commissioner of Higher Education

Date: March 18, 2020

Subject: **IMPORTANT COVID-19 UPDATE**

I am writing with an important message about minimizing student presence on our campuses in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are facing an intensifying public health crisis in our country, in Montana, and on our campuses. As the Montana University System, we are totally committed to supporting to the health and safety of our students and employees. This means that we must make every effort to implement effective social distancing and crisis management strategies that have been outlined by state and federal authorities. As such, MUS campuses should, effective immediately:

1. **Ask all students currently away on spring break travel that they do not return to campus.** Campuses can work with students in exceptional circumstances such as needing to complete coursework that requires in-person instruction (e.g. some CTE courses) or needing to retrieve essential medication from their residence halls. For all other students, campuses will ensure that course work can continue remotely and that students can retrieve other items from their dormitory rooms when conditions allow.
2. **Urge students currently on campus to consider an alternative living arrangement.** Campuses will clearly and immediately communicate the severity of the emerging public health situation to students currently living in residential halls and ask them to carefully consider whether they have any other living arrangement that will provide a safer learning and living environment. There will be a small number of students who ultimately determine that campus living is indeed their best available option, but we expect campuses to do what they can to work with those students to ensure that this is indeed the case.
3. **Focus on the most essential services only.** Campuses will continue to serve the students that remain on campus. For those students remaining on campus, however, services will be limited to those deemed strictly essential. This will promote a safer environment for both the remaining students and the employees required to work on campus to serve them. For example, there will be little or no programming or events for students, dining services will be consolidated and limited to Grab and Go models, libraries will curtail operations or close, and recreation centers will close. Moreover, campuses may ask students to change residences in order to further consolidate services and limit the number of campus employees required on site to maintain essential operations.

Students staying on campus will be expected to remain on campus and not bring guests from off-campus.

Clearly, these are extraordinary measures, but they are enacted in response to an extraordinary public health and safety crisis generated by the COVID-19 virus. While the steps outlined above will undoubtedly generate a great deal of disruption and hardship for our students and campus communities, they are warranted given the severity of the health threat we face. As conditions continue to change, my office will be on standby to assist campuses with the implementation of these decisions and any additional actions that are required to make sure that the Montana University System continues to offer exemplary support to our students, employees, and communities during such difficult times.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clayton T. Christian', written in a cursive style.

Clayton T. Christian
Commissioner of Higher Education