April 27, 2020

Hello Pirates,

This spring, COVID-19 has done its best to distract us. But then, look at the ECU news stories coming out over the past weeks. The news from ECU is all about the mission. You’ll see important contributions for regional success (from reusing PPE to regional water quality) and indicators that our focus on student success brings excellence in teaching (thank you BOG winner Dr. William Allen) and extraordinary student outcomes (William Guiler receives ECU’s first Goldwater). I am always amazed at the resilience and grittiness of ECU Pirates. I witnessed it in 1999 when I first became a Pirate and four weeks later we coped with Hurricane Floyd. I see that same spirit in the current Nation of Pirates as they press on despite the pandemic. No doubt that we Pirates continue to do our part to flatten the curve but we also are resolute and undeterred from achieving the mission. I have never been at a more mission-centric place — success of students and success of the eastern region. Thank you Pirates for finishing strong with a successful spring semester. Unprecedented, to say the least.

Having said that, I think we all recognize that what we are doing right now as a society is not sustainable indefinitely. When normal, we bring nearly 33,000 people onto our campus(es) daily and we have purposely built campuses that are dense and walkable. That density won’t change, and that’s a good thing for many reasons. Fundamentally, it is the right environment for student success, and it permits mission-driven research that would not take place otherwise. It’s just not good in the midst of a pandemic. We are doing many “costly” things right now to flatten the curve, and – government permitting – I remain convinced that these Pirate sacrifices will permit us to return to campus in-person in the fall. Yes, you read me correctly. We intend to be back on ECU’s campus in the fall, although we will do so while taking the necessary precautions, informed by the most reliable and current data and research findings. After all, we are a University.

On Thursday, N.C. Governor Roy Cooper extended the stay-at-home order through May 8. What our scientifically informed approach will look like when we return is not exactly precise right now, but please understand that we are committed to using best national practices and to the safety of our students and employees. The picture is not fully in focus yet, but we are getting there. We’ll probably need to test and trace. We’ll probably need to restrict group sizes and impose some distancing. We’ll probably have to prohibit certain types of university-sponsored travel. We’ll probably have to provide some PPE and scrub the place down with greater frequency. We have smart people at ECU working on all of these aspects of mitigation. They are looking at data, they are reading the research, and they are planning accordingly. We will return to campus to learn, to innovate, to play – and we will do it safely.

Pirates like being the underdog and then prevailing. Please understand that no virus will defeat this Pirate Nation. We are too smart and we are too tough for that to happen. Bring on the fall; I can’t wait to “embrace” some new students and welcome back all our returning Pirates. In the interim, do the right thing and flatten that curve.

Regards, RonM

Ron Mitchelson
Interim Chancellor