MEMORANDUM

TO: ECU Community
FROM: Interim Chancellor Ron Mitchelson
DATE: March 13, 2020
SUBJ: Facing the ongoing challenges of COVID-19

The new coronavirus outbreak and spread of COVID-19 present ongoing challenges for Greenville, for North Carolina, for the United States, and for the globe. These are unusual times and call for some unusual measures in response. Regardless of operational details, our primary goal is to protect the health and well-being of ECU faculty, staff, and students as well as the Greenville community. However, the larger goal of suppressing the spread of this coronavirus and its related disease are also paramount. Flattening the curve of infection is everyone's responsibility, including Pirates. And so, we cancel, we postpone, we curtail, we limit social interaction, we restrict travel, we avoid clusters, and we go online with our instructional capacity. Make no mistake, this limitation on Pirate behavior is abnormal and costly. There is not enough time or money to do necessary adjustments perfectly, but Pirates can do it as well as any university in the country and we will. Thank you in advance for your cooperative spirit.

Being accustomed to the word “no” is not part of our ECU culture. We try to figure out a way to say “yes.” Unfortunately, our unusual measures in response to this coronavirus will involve an unusually high frequency of “no.” For example, until further notice, university-sponsored travel is suspended for international travel and to large domestic gatherings accessed by public transportation. While exceptions can be requested (e.g., through a supervisor and one additional administrative level), you should not be surprised to get a “no” response from the Provost or the Chancellor. University-sponsored auto travel to meet with individual(s) is permissible, although the traveler should still be cautious. Personal travel (not university sponsored) is much harder to regulate on the front end, i.e., we are not in a position simply to prohibit. However, if you decide to personally travel to a large group setting or a domestic “hot spot” via public transportation, please understand that you are placing colleagues in jeopardy and you will undergo a (simple) protocol upon return and this could result in a visit with your physician and/or self-quarantine. All else being equal, ECU does not desire for its students, faculty, or staff to travel (especially to areas with active community transmission of COVID-19) until further notice. It’s in everyone’s best interest.

Finally, in addition to travel restrictions, I want to express appreciation for the reduced volume of large-group (>100) interactions that we now (and will) witness on our campus. These cancellations and postponements are never easy and organizers are to be commended for their sacrifice. There are many costs associated with these cancellations and postponements, including emotional, and I am grateful that this university is willing to absorb these costs in order to reduce risk. It’s a key step in reducing the velocity of the coronavirus spread. Some of these events like Pirates Aboard (postponed from March 21 and 28) are of significance to us all. We will be missing all sorts of events ranging from the arts to athletics. This episode is costly indeed!

While the exact duration of these proactive restrictions is as unknown as the coronavirus itself, I remain confident that we will successfully reduce the peak of its spread and avert some of the reactive steps that we have witnessed across the globe. I am confident that we will emerge on the other side of this episode with a healthy Pirate nation. I am confident that Pirates will come together as they always do to face the threat and disarm it. The spirit of Pirates is alive and well and cannot be dampened by this virus.

Thank you for your personal efforts to keep us healthy and to do our important part in this collective effort to lead and illustrate what responsible behavior looks like. Pirates are shining examples!