MEMORANDUM

TO: ECU Community
FROM: Ron Mitchelson, Interim Chancellor
DATE: July 24, 2020
SUBJ: Campus Update

As I witness students and their families begin moving into campus housing, I am reminded how much has changed since the start of last academic year. I am pleased to welcome these new Pirates to campus. Throughout the summer we have been busy preparing for the safe return of Pirate Nation and resuming in-person activities. From faculty preparing courses for the temporary shift to block scheduling, to campus operations preparing our spaces for in-person activities, to preparing student programming in this de-densified environment, so many of us have been busy preparing for the start of a fall term unlike any we have ever experienced. As we approach the first day of classes, please know how appreciative I am of all the good work to prepare the campus.

In addition to our focus on readying campus for the fall term, on Thursday, July 16 BOG Chair Ramsey issued a directive to all UNC System chancellors to engage in budget scenario planning to model potential impacts of COVID-19 ranging from no impact to the worst-case scenario of a 50 percent budget shortfall/cut. ECU had been looking at budget impacts prior to that directive but we had not considered the worst-case scenarios of 25 and 50 percent that became newsworthy and worrisome to all. As required, ECU will submit the skeleton of a plan to meet these scenarios by Friday, July 24. I want to remind one and all that this is an exercise and that we should expect budget shortfalls associated directly and indirectly with COVID-19 that will need to be addressed over the next two fiscal years. As in the past, ECU will take a deliberate approach to planning for fiscal sustainability, and you can expect a committee to be named early in the fall semester. We’ve done this before (in 2012 and 2014) and in those prior committees we have included faculty and staff in that planning process. ECU Pirates will respect the process even if the recommendations are hard to swallow. My responsibility is to protect our primary mission.

Subsequent to the scenario-planning directive, the UNC System issued a memorandum to the institutions on July 21 extending and expanding chancellor authorities to respond to COVID-19 financial impacts. Those authorities now include all funding sources and permit temporary furloughs, temporary salary reductions, and reductions-in-force. We are reviewing the updated System guidance and ECU HR will seek clarification as needed. While faculty are excluded from these new authorities, the memo indicates that the UNC System is preparing guidance related to procedures for faculty.
While we have an obligation to consider potential fiscal scenarios and our campus will engage in this dialogue over the next few months, our current primary focus remains on welcoming students back to Greenville and our campus. The investments we have made to achieve this (emotional, financial, creative, effort) are monumental. THANK YOU! I ask that we all stay calm and collected as we continue to cope with the impacts of COVID-19. It is persistent. I do promise that we will be thoughtful in any process of budget adjustment that we might face. The mission is important and so are the people who carry it out. I have deep respect for our mission and for you, Pirates. I promise that we will do our very best to minimize negative impacts while meeting the university’s mission. I have no crystal ball but this much I do know, Pirates will plan together and we will act together.

And finally, since I have your attention, get those masks on and pledge against racism and injustice at https://oed.ecu.edu/stand-with-oed/.