

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update 3-14-20 from Dean Scott Thomas

I have heard from many of you about the significant responses by the University and College to the health emergency resulting from the novel coronavirus leading to the COVID-19 illness. I share many of your concerns and appreciate the anxiety that those in our community are facing. It seems that a reshaping of our lives is occurring over a few weeks. Once we have made it clear of the emergency, we will make time to understand how these events have shaped our college community and what we have learned through our shared experience.

In the moment though — more than ever — we are being called to ensure that our students receive the care and support they need to navigate their pathway through the crisis. Their anxiety is palpable. The familiar, comforting rhythms of their classes and field experiences have evaporated in front of their eyes. Like us, they have varying abilities and orientation to manage the changes that are taking place in their academic programs. With seven weeks remaining in the semester, much hangs in the balance for them, especially our graduating seniors. And, like us, their academic programs are one part of a much broader set of concerns over family, friends, and personal well-being. We must stay focused on understanding and addressing their needs while so much is shifting around them. In the end, they will provide solutions to crises like the one we are facing today.

The pace of change in our understanding of the crisis, and of actions taking place independently of us that force or shape our course of action, has made it difficult for us to stay as far ahead of the situation as we would prefer. We do not have all of the answers, and we are ironing out new or altered communications channels and decision-making protocols across the university to best ensure that we provide the most current information and guidance at any moment. Each day we learn more, improve our communication capacity, and a decision-making structure enabling three guiding priorities:

1. Prioritize health and safety;
2. Maintain academic progress for our students;
3. Keep basic campus operations functioning.

Thank you for the thought and care that each of you is devoting to addressing the emergency we are navigating. The response already emerging from our community is heartening. Everyone is stressed, and that is okay. Please remember to be kind to yourself and one another. From the local context of your department to the global health crisis itself, these are the moments in which the expertise in our college will genuinely make a powerful difference for everyone.

You will find a catalog of all campus communication and COVID-19 related information at <http://go.uvm.edu/covid19>. At that website, you will also find a comprehensive FAQ for a variety of audiences.

I will be following up with relevant college-specific updates as developments warrant. Thank you for your continued commitment to maintaining a healthy community supportive of the well-being of everyone in our college.