May 6, 2009

To the Faculty:

Concern about the H1N1 influenza (aka “swine flu”) is an evolving story that appears to be changing daily. Nevertheless, several groups on campus began meeting this week to consider how various operations would be impacted by spread of the flu among broad segments of the USF community. The possibility of full or partial closures of the campus seems to be diminishing. However, a more likely scenario is that a large number of our students, faculty, and staff could contract the flu and be ill for short periods of time. Those of us in the Provost’s Office believe we should begin thinking in a measured and proactive manner about how such a development would affect the delivery of instruction, a sentiment with which a representative of the Faculty Senate has concurred. While we want to avoid an overreaction, some advance planning may serve us well. An immediate concern is the summer semester that begins next week, but it is worth noting that the impact of H1N1 has the potential to extend into the Fall semester.

The following items are presented as information and as some issues to ponder. These are offered with the recognition that USF system campuses may be impacted differently, so actions appropriate for one campus may not apply to all. With that in mind:

- As warranted, any news about H1N1 pertinent to the USF community will be posted on the USF homepage (http://www.usf.edu/index.asp).

- It would be prudent to include in your syllabus, and/or to announce in class, a note to the effect that in the unlikely event of a university closure, alterations in course content and/or structure may be necessary.

- Consider how your attendance policies might be affected. It may be wise at present to encourage students not to attend class if they are feeling ill. Importantly, all indications at present suggest that H1N1 cases in the U.S. are not fatal (the two deaths so far are reported to be of persons with preexisting medical complications), but do cause a short-term debilitation. If H1N1 spreads widely, large numbers of students could be missing classes for various lengths of time.

- The same advice should be heeded by faculty as well. This may be a time to forego heroic efforts to make it to class if you don’t feel well, especially if exhibiting the symptoms typically associated with H1N1 (see http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm). How would you handle matters if forced to miss a number of your classes?

- Also, how would your policies for make-up exams be impacted in an environment where a substantial proportion of your students are unable to take scheduled examinations? Even those teaching on-line courses might have to grapple with this issue.
• If the university was forced to close, or if significant numbers of your students are stricken with the flu, are there portions of your course that could be delivered through on-line technologies? In this regard:

  o The Center for 21st Century Teaching Excellence has been asked to be ready for a significant increase in demand for support to faculty in making course delivery available on-line, including the development and administration of examinations.
  o Information Technology has been asked to prepare for an upsurge in demand if the university experiences a closure or there is a significant shift to on-line technologies. We recognize that supporting the university’s IT structure will be crucial in responding to either development.

• Aside from teaching responsibilities, we are keenly aware that faculty members are pursuing research projects. Those who are working in laboratory or studio settings would be particularly impacted by a closure, so we are thinking through protocols to address the challenges posed by a large-scale shut down of the campus.

• Be assured that there are a number of other university functions for which plans are being made. These include residential students, athletic facilities, and non-academic campus events (e.g., Sun Dome events, summer camps, etc.).

To reiterate, this note is simply intended to encourage you to engage in some proactive thinking about a number of “what would I do if…..?” questions. Let us hope that this proves to be a situation where the best laid plans are never needed.

Best wishes – and be well.

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