



March 27, 2020

Dear Students, Faculty and Staff,

I write today to update you on several developments that are important for our community and to share some of my recent experiences with you.

With every challenge comes opportunity, and all of you have demonstrated that during this first full week of online classes. Don't get me wrong; we're still working through technical issues and will continue to do so. We're dealing with social challenges that come with being separated geographically. And yet, we're rising to the occasion and doing the best we can by working together. Thank you for putting in the long hours, for being patient with technology, for reaching out and helping one another.

I had the pleasure of "dropping in" on several online classes this week. I was impressed by the strong, positive attitude of everyone working to make their learning event successful. And it was great for the students and faculty to enjoy seeing and being with each other – albeit virtually – again. It also made me appreciate our IT professionals and the work they put into this effort to ensure the architecture was able to deliver education. And I can't express how grateful I am for our faculty who despite great challenges, were able to make all of this happen. At the end of the day, we are here for you, our students, and I'm very grateful for your understanding, flexibility, resilience, and support.

Several students in the classes I attended were concerned about commencement, which I understand completely. Our graduates have earned a celebration, and I'm pleased to report to you the following tentative plans for celebrating their achievements:

- Subject to permissible conditions, Law, doctoral, bachelor's and master's ceremonies are currently rescheduled for Friday, August 7 and Saturday, August 8 in Columbia.
- Palmetto College campuses will join the commencement ceremonies in Columbia.
- All of these ceremonies will be livestreamed.

- Alternative plans will be made for the School of Medicine.
- Alternative plans will also be made for the three comprehensive campuses in Aiken, Beaufort and Upstate.
- We will put a virtual commencement together for all those who are unable to return to UofSC campus to participate in person on the currently scheduled 7 and 8 August dates.
- A short survey will be sent to graduates within the next several days to gauge participation and determine the final schedule of commencement events.

I am hopeful and excited about an August commencement, but I must emphasize that it is a *tentative* plan, subject to change as we continue to work with state leaders and public health experts. I promise, we will gather together if it is safe to do so.

Between now and then, we remain focused on the health and safety of those in our community. We know of some students, faculty and staff who have tested positive for COVID-19. The privacy of those individuals must be protected, but we also are working closely with the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control to identify and notify those who may have been in close contact with these individuals so they can take necessary precautions. That includes self-quarantining and closely monitoring their health.

We want to make sure that anyone in our community who becomes ill receives the support they need. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, please let us know by calling Student Health Services at 803-576-6515. If you are a student, you also can report by logging into your [secure Patient Portal](#) and send a message to the Primary Care Team Nurse. The university will protect your privacy and not share your personal health information.

As you know, we made a decision earlier this month to close campus residence halls to everyone except those with extenuating circumstances. This led to some difficult choices, but they were made in the interest of protecting our students from an outbreak of COVID-19, which would have been inevitable if everyone was permitted to stay. To date, we have only 173 students currently living in residence halls, and that number will decrease over time.

Because social distancing is the key to preventing the spread of the virus, it is not yet safe to bring students back to campus to retrieve their belongings. Please know that as soon as public health officials tell us it is safe, we will share a schedule for students to return. In the meantime, we appreciate the continued patience and understanding of parents, families and students.

No matter where you are or how far you might be from campus, remember that you are an important part of the Gamecock family. Many of you have contacted me to ask how you can help those who are most in need as a result of this global pandemic. We have established a **COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund** to help students who are facing

financial hardship as a result of unexpected travel home, job loss or unexpected technology expenses. If you can, please consider [making a contribution](#).

News is changing daily, and we are committed to keeping you informed. I'm pleased to share that we will hold **two livestreamed town hall events – one on Monday, March 30 at 6:00 p.m. EST for students and families, and another on Tuesday, March 31 at 6:00 p.m. EST for faculty and staff**. Instructions for participating in these events will be posted on the university's [main coronavirus web page](#) on Sunday.

Thank you for your continued teamwork, patience and support.

Healthy Carolina!

Forever to Thee,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob". The letters are cursive and fluid, with the "B" being particularly large and prominent.

**Bob Caslen**