

Subject: Preparing SRU for the fall semester

Date: Tuesday, May 12, 2020 at 1:29:06 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Office of the President

To: SRU Stakeholder

May 12, 2020

Dear Students:

Now that the spring semester has concluded, many of us have turned our attention to the fall. While I hope that our community will again be together on campus, it would be naïve and dishonest to assure you with any certainty that it will be safe to do so.

The health and safety of our community remains my top priority. As such, University leadership is carefully monitoring the guidance from Harrisburg and is regularly in touch with officials from other schools across the region. I can assure you that if a safe method for reopening SRU to face-to-face instruction emerges, we will be together in the fall.

Still, because of the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, we are currently planning for multiple scenarios. These include the possibility of another disrupted semester like we had this spring; a fully online semester, should the pandemic prove intractable; and an on-campus experience with more limited personal contact than we would normally expect.

When we moved quickly to a distance education model this spring, a key concern was the digital divide that some of you might experience. Too much reliance on sophisticated technology, we feared, would cause students with older computer hardware or weaker bandwidth to be hindered from successfully completing the semester. While we did provide computers and/or enhanced bandwidth to students who sought assistance, we remained concerned that an inability to access courses would cause some of you to abandon your education. As a result, we asked faculty to be cognizant of potential technological limitations when they converted their courses to distance formats. In short, we asked them to keep things simple. It seems that by at least one measure, this method was successful. SRU actually had fewer students withdraw from classes this semester than what typically occurs during a spring semester.

As we plan for a variety of possible scenarios for the fall – including a potential disruption should a second wave of COVID-19 sweep across our country – we will continue to focus on closing the digital gap for our students. However, simplicity will no longer be a stated goal. We will be working with faculty to provide the supports necessary to employ a more robust range of distance methodologies, including, where possible, both synchronous and asynchronous portions of each course. If we must employ some distance education in the fall, we will use technology to build the most robust courses possible. I am confident in our ability to meet this challenge.

I'd like to thank all of you for your understanding and perseverance throughout this unprecedented time in our lives. All of you have worked hard to successfully face the challenges of the pandemic head-on and should be proud of your efforts.

While I cannot predict the future with any certainty, I can certainly assure you that together, we will

get through it and that SRU will remain an extraordinary university.

Best,

William J. Behre
President