



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

INTERNAL COMMUNIQUÉ

May 14, 2020

Campus Operations Update

Dear Colleagues,

I know this has been a long haul. The last seven weeks have tested us, draining us emotionally, physically and, for some, financially. In the background, all our statutory meetings and most business operations have continued online, while teaching and final assessments are also online. Our momentum that has taken us to this point is testament to the hard work, resilience, and dedication of students, faculty and staff. A heartfelt thank you to all.

I write today to share some updates on our progress and the way forward.

Planning for the Future

On a regional level, yesterday Chancellor Robert Bermudez hosted the annual **University Council Meeting** where Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, presented his report of our University's achievements in the past year. A critical component of this meeting was discussion on the financial health of our institution and the key decisions that have to be made as we navigate our current reality.

You should be aware that the University generally – St. Augustine Campus particularly – is unlikely to emerge financially unscathed from this pandemic. We are not immune to the major shift in the world economy. Just as the country and the region must transform themselves to deal with a drastically changed reality, the University must also be radical as it adapts to this fluid situation. We can't afford to sit still and must now plan and strategize as never before.

On a Campus level, we continue to be in planning and strategizing mode. Faculty and staff are working to ensure that students are healthy and safe, and that all students complete their courses this semester with the best possible academic delivery. At the same time, the Campus Leadership is committed to attending to the personal and economic well-being of this Campus community; all members and our families. In that regard, we are forming multi-functional teams to do scenario planning, re-engineer, and reimagine 2020/2021 and beyond. Their work will research, discuss and develop plans to future proof this great institution.

At the core of the work of these multi-functional efforts the Incident Management Team (IMT), as we implement strategies in the best interest of all. Constant collaboration is driving this phase. Deans, Directors and Heads of Department have been asked to assess their operations and to present, in short order, plans for any adjustments that need to be made as we contemplate the next few weeks, and by extension, the upcoming academic year. **As such, there are no decisions with respect to finances, job security, lines of business and the like. We await the data coming back from all our planning teams to help us guide the way forward.**

In working to resolve the many issues we need to address, I know we will find a way to thrive in a virtual environment, and continue educating our students at a high level of competence and rigour. It will call for us to be creative and flexible, but I believe that there are no problems we cannot solve if rather than focussing on what we are missing or lacking, we turn our attention to the work of innovation for the future. Let us make the most of this opportunity to assess how we do business as a University so that we emerge from this crisis stronger than ever.

Phased Resumption of Operations

Our country's leadership has done an outstanding job balancing health concerns with economic realities in crafting a very thoughtful plan to ease restrictions. Now, we have begun Phase 1 of our much-hoped for return to normalcy. In line with these updated regulations, we look to a phased resumption of our Campus operations. It will involve flexible working arrangements with scheduling and rostering. Deans, Directors and Heads of Departments will collaborate with their staff accordingly.

Prior to any reoccupation of the Campus, maintenance checks will be done on equipment and facilities. This will be a responsibility of our Occupational, Health, Safety and the Environment (OHSE) Unit and the Division of Facilities Management (DFM). **We will advise of when actual reoccupation will begin but I estimate that this can take place in mid-June for staff.**

In the interim, other than those designated staff maintaining vital Campus operations, conducting COVID-19 research, or supporting students still on Campus, we will continue to work online. Deans and Heads of Departments will continue to implement policies and procedures to support staff working remotely.

For students, we are committed to retaining our high standards and plan to implement a **hybrid system** – a mix of remote and on-site activity – for the new academic year

which begins in August 2020. A decision is yet to be made with regard to the **Graduation Ceremonies** normally held in late October; as previously mentioned, it will quite likely be held in January 2021. We will be monitoring the evolving situation carefully over the coming weeks.

A gradual resumption of operations will be guided by the following principles:

- **Commitment to well-being, in compliance with the national protocols:** I must emphasise that our plans are centred on doing everything possible and within established protocols to keep the Campus environment safe. We have assessed COVID-19 data from the appropriate authorities to develop our plans. I can assure you that our revised work arrangements will facilitate physical distancing, and provide for frequent hand-washing and ongoing sanitation.
- **Tailored guidelines to suit the varied needs of the community:** There is no one-size-fits-all plan that works for every office and operation at the University. Unit leaders have been asked to plan the specific details with their staff. Detailed guidelines and procedures will be provided in short order.
- **Continued use of technology to facilitate engagement:** Globally, there is a move to online events. In keeping with this, all Campus events, including conferences and symposia, have transitioned online with the support of the Campus IT Services (CITS) and Marketing and Communications (M&C) teams. This will continue.
- **Staying connected:** As a community, we need to be resolute in caring for each other. Social distancing can destroy society. Please check on each other, send a text, a WhatsApp or make a call to keep in touch. Also stay connected for constant updates via UWI email, social media and the Campus website.
- **Practicing self-care:** Most importantly, as we continue to strike a balance between all the tasks we must accomplish on a daily basis, I urge you to take care of yourselves. We are creatures of habit and when our routine is broken for so long, we can fall victim to stress long before symptoms become noticeable.

Take that walk, do the zoom exercise class, or family chat, play with the dogs, whatever your method of detox... please do not hesitate to reach out for support. For staff, there is the [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#) available for all employees. Students have the [Counselling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#). Both services are available remotely.

University life will unquestionably look quite different when this is all over. Hopefully, the gradual resumption of operations will continue nationally, and we can engage the new semester as we have in the past, albeit with health and safety adjustments.

In closing, I must say that I am truly humbled to be leading our institution at this time. I

am grateful for the work and support of the senior management team team who share the decision-making with me; to each member of staff who continues to be committed to our students and to our future; as well as to our students who continue to provide honest and constructive feedback and work with us to define the “new normal”. Your dedication and determination fill me with hope and pride. There is no finer collection of minds and hearts I could ask for to navigate our Campus through a crisis of this nature, or to provide support to the wider national and regional community.

Please keep checking our [Campus COVID-19 website](#) and be sure to follow the protocols to ensure your health, safety, and wellbeing.

Our world is changing, but our mission remains the same: **to advance learning, create knowledge and foster innovation**. This is even more important as we contemplate The UWI's future and how teaching and delivery will evolve, I believe, for the better.

Professor Brian Copeland

Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal

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