Dear Health Sciences Student,

As we are sure you have heard, there are some changes that have to take place with how classes are delivered in the fall. Every department was asked to consider which of their classes could be taught online and which had to be taught in a face to face format. As a department, we discussed the issue at length and looked at all of the options.

We decided it would be in the best interest of the students in our college and specifically in our department if we switched all of our Health Sciences courses to an online, asynchronous format. This means you will not be required to attend class virtually at any specific time. You will have access to all of the learning materials at any given time throughout the semester. If you were already signed up for an online section of a class, nothing will change for you.

We understand this is not ideal for many of our students. We really wish there was a better option, but in times like these we have to take safety and risk seriously. We also feel we are uniquely set up to provide an outstanding educational experience to all of our students, even if it is delivered in a way that isn’t as traditional. We are confident that, although your experience this fall may be different, it will not be inferior. We have made significant revisions and improvements to the courses that will better facilitate this new model of teaching and learning.

If you are interested in the main points we considered, feel free to continue reading.

The Health Sciences Department has more students than all of the other departments in our college. We fill the classrooms and move hundreds of students through labs every day. There is literally no way to ensure the proper social distancing and sanitization steps necessary to keep you safe while maintaining these numbers.

We explored models that cut back the numbers of on-campus students, but there does not seem to be a fair way to decide who can come to class or lab and who cannot. Imagine a class of 120 scheduled to meet in room 101 of our building. If we were to keep students 6 feet apart from each other, that classroom drops to a capacity of only 30. With masks and sanitization, we might be able to get to 50 or 60…but how do we decide who can come and who cannot?

There are also requirements on screening students before they participate in class and lab activities as well as required methods for controlling person to person contact as students enter and leave classrooms and labs. That would be excessively challenging given our numbers. If we did a temperature check on a group of 120, assuming we only took 10 seconds per student, we would spend 20 minutes just checking temperatures. And where do students wait while we do that? Outside? In November?

Another important consideration is the fact that most of the programs in our college (i.e. nursing, radiologic sciences, medical laboratory science etc.) require a certain amount of face to face instruction, both in the classroom and in lab settings. Our department does not. By going online, we allow the other programs to spread out and use the space in a way that is safer for
them as they do their required face to face instruction. Yes, that means we are sacrificing for their benefit, but don’t forget we are all in this together.

As a department, we have been working very hard to revise our courses and make sure we have a variety of helpful resources, including recorded lectures, tutors, Supplemental Instruction, engaging learning and lab activities and course materials that facilitate effective learning. Most of us would agree that it is hard to completely replace the experience of being in the classroom and attending a lecture, but we feel we are pretty close with a lot of what we have put together.

As you begin your courses you will be given specific instructions on how best to access all of the resources available to you. We want to assure you that your professor will remain the most valuable resource you have. We will have virtual office hours where you can drop in and chat with your professors. While we do not anticipate having scheduled times where we require attendance at a broadcast lecture, we will do what we can to be available and helpful. Fortunately, we live in a time when video conferencing is an easy and effective way to communicate.

We hope you understand the reasoning behind the decision we have made. We are fortunate to have experts in healthcare on our faculty, including an epidemiologist who spent decades tracking diseases like COVID-19. We are hopeful about the future, but remain concerned and cautious when it comes to the health and safety of our students, staff and faculty. We are confident we can provide you with an excellent learning experience in the fall. It will be an adjustment for all of us, but we are ready for it and hope you are too!

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