



Larry Hogan
Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford
Lt. Governor

Ian D. MacFarlane
Chair

James D. Fielder, Jr., Ph. D.
Secretary

March 11, 2020

Dear President:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of several items related to distance education in response to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 and answer questions that we have received from a number of campuses. Please read this letter in its entirety and please share with staff as you see fit.

As you may be aware, on March 5, 2020, Governor Larry Hogan declared a state of emergency pertaining to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 to ramp up Maryland's coordinated response across all levels of government¹. We recognize that institutions are expected to make decisions regarding campus operations that are in the best interest of the students, faculty, staff, and the community that they serve. We appreciate the sharing of information regarding campus decisions in light of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic.

Social distancing is one of the recommended strategies from the CDC to prevent the spread of Coronavirus/COVID-19. We are aware that institutions are actively moving academic coursework to a distance education modality as a method to promote social distancing. **Considering that Maryland is currently in a state of emergency declared by Governor Hogan, no approval from MHEC at this time is needed to move lectures, discussions, assessments, and other academic coursework to an online format.**

While we do not require approval for the emergency transition of coursework to an online format, we ask that institutions provide official notification to MHEC of any campus-wide changes to academic programs that are made in light of Coronavirus/COVID-19.

Regarding veterans using their educational benefits through the GI Bill®², the US Department of Veterans Affairs has not yet issued a statement regarding the impact on education benefits to veterans as it pertains to a mid-semester transition of academic coursework to a distance education format. We will share information regarding this matter as it becomes available.

Regarding programs that lead to licensure, the US Department of Education has left the decision to accept clock-hours in a distance education format up to the applicable licensure

¹ Governor Larry Hogan Declares State of Emergency, Expands Statewide Response to Novel Coronavirus, <https://governor.maryland.gov/2020/03/05/governor-larry-hogan-declares-state-of-emergency-expands-statewide-response-to-novel-coronavirus/>

² "GI Bill®" is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). More information about education benefits offered by VA is available at the official U.S. government website at www.benefits.va.gov/gibill

body³. We have asked licensing boards at the Maryland Department of Labor and the Maryland Department of Health to provide guidance regarding the acceptance or denial of a change in modality (e.g., face-to-face or distance education) for clock-hours that are required for licensure or certification. We have asked that this guidance (or a timeline for the guidance) be provided by close of business Friday, March 13, 2020. We are similarly in active communication with the Maryland State Department of Education. Again, we will share information regarding this matter as it becomes available.

Institutions should ensure that the quality of academic coursework is maintained if a course is moved to an online format. We encourage all institutions to provide training and resources to faculty, including faculty that have not traditionally taught using distance education. Attached are several resources that have recently been published. Faculty will need to provide clear expectations to students regarding participation, changes in assignments or assessments, and other relevant matters.

Institutions should also ensure that academic support services for students are maintained if face-to-face instruction is limited or suspended. Continuity of academic student services (e.g., disability services, tutoring services) should be provided. It will be necessary to have clear communications with faculty, staff, and students regarding any changes in access to these academic services.

Please contact Dr. Emily A. A. Dow, Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs, emily.dow@maryland.gov, and Trish Gordon McCown, Director for Academic Affairs, trish.mccown@maryland.gov, with questions regarding information shared in this letter. In addition, Ms. Gordon McCown may assist with any questions regarding students using Veterans Education Benefits administered by the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Please continue to keep MHEC informed of changes to campus operations as it pertains to the Coronavirus/COVID-19.

Thank you,



Dr. James D. Fielder
Secretary

³ US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education:
Guidance for interruptions of study related to Coronavirus (COVID-19), March 5, 2020
<https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19>

Resources Specific to Pedagogy and Distance Education

1. US Department of Education
Guidance for interruptions of study related to Coronavirus (COVID-19)
<https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19>
2. Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC)
Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education, (2011)
<https://www.nc-sara.org/sites/default/files/files/2019-08/C-RAC%20Guidelines%282011%29.pdf>
3. Online Learning Consortium
Webinar: Making the Shift to Online Learning: Emergency Preparedness & Instructional Continuity
<https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/webinar/making-the-shift-to-online-learning-emergency-preparedness-instructional-continuity/>
4. Online Learning Consortium
Webinar: Using Live, Online Sessions to Support Continuity of Instruction
<https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/webinar/using-live-online-sessions-to-support-continuity-of-instruction/>
5. The Chronicle of Higher Education
Going Online in a Hurry: What to Do and Where to Start
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Going-Online-in-a-Hurry-What/248207>
6. Inside Higher Education
Transforming Your Online Teaching From Crisis to Community
<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/03/11/ensuring-online-teaching-engages-students-and-maintains-community-opinion>

General Resources for Higher Education Regarding COVID-19

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Resources for Institutes of Higher Education
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fcolleges-universities.html
2. US Department of Education
COVID-19 ("Coronavirus") Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel
<https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus?src=feature>
3. American College Health Association

Preparing for COVID-19

https://www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Preparing_for_COVID-19_March-3-2020.pdf

Other Relevant Resources Regarding COVID-1

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

2. Maryland Department of Health

Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak

<https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>