

Friday, July 17, 2020

Dear Mercyhurst Community,

Many of our colleagues have been hard at work this summer making the critical decisions necessary to protect our community against COVID-19 as we prepare to open for classes on Aug. 19. I can't begin to describe the enormity of that job, and I must applaud our COVID-19 Team members, under the direction of Dr. Laura Zirkle, for their dedication and stamina.

Throughout the years, I have often found myself reflecting, "What would the Sisters think?" In this case, there is no doubt in my mind that they'd be jubilant over the job our community is doing to ensure a safe, healthy return to campus.

We took a very Mercyhurst approach to our planning - broadly consultative, deeply analytic, and mission-driven. We relied on bedrock principles: protecting the health of our entire community, preserving our ability to deliver on Mercyhurst's mission of teaching, and doing all of this in a spirit of fairness and compassion.

Everything has been thought out in detail despite the fluidity of the current circumstances. For every Plan A, there is a Plan B. Nothing is being left to chance. Case in point is Wednesday's decision by the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference (PSAC) to cancel fall sports. While this comes as an enormous disappointment, we are prepared to do what we can to salvage the season and take advantage of the competitive down-time to develop new activities that will serve to challenge the physical and mental abilities of our student-athletes and, hopefully, prepare us for competition in the spring.

As I promised you last month, we intend to communicate with you every step of the way, and today we are launching our new COVID-19 website – ["Resilience & Resolve"](#) – which we urge you to visit for regular updates. And, to provide further clarity, we intend to share short, focused videos in the days and weeks ahead that will illustrate many of the changes that you can expect to encounter upon your return to campus.

Thanks to the hard work of our faculty, students can expect to receive a compelling educational experience in a variety of forms, be they in-class, online, or a mixture of both. This past spring, faculty rose to the challenge of making their courses digital in two hectic weeks. This summer, they are drawing on what they learned through that process to further adapt and prepare. To the faculty reading this letter: please know how much we appreciate everything you are doing to make our first full COVID-era semester a success for everyone.

However sound our process, I know our decisions come with a real human cost: mandatory facial coverings, daily health screenings, physical distancing, and so on. I offer two thoughts to consider as we move forward. One: More than 94 years ago, our founding Sisters of Mercy set the bar, illustrating time and again their fortitude in adapting constructively to challenging situations. Can we do any less? And two: While our shared safety depends on the course of the pandemic, it also depends on all of us, on our conscientious care for one another and on our ability to make the best of this unprecedented challenge.

Together, we can do this.

Carpe Diem,



Michael T. Victor, JD, LL.D.

President, Mercyhurst University

