



May 21, 2020

Dear Mariner Community,

Marymount California University is enthusiastic about getting back to face-to-face classes on our beautiful Oceanview campus. We miss the excitement of having our students here where we can have the biggest impact with our small size and personal relationships between faculty and students. We are built around a small-means-more philosophy, and we can do what large universities cannot. We can be remote without being isolated in this pandemic upheaval. Our faculty is building our fall program with maximum flexibility. We want to be face-to-face as soon as possible within federal, state and local guidelines, but the safety and health of our students, faculty and staff is critical.

We cannot predict the future, but we can plan for different versions of the future. Such scenario planning allows us to be ready as the reality of facts takes us where we must go. We can watch the future unfold through a lens of preparedness.

There are many facets of this pandemic, and it would not be prudent to lock in one solution, but we can be ready to react in a flexible and nimble fashion. This is true of our academic campus and our townhouse-style residential campus. In many ways, we are built for this flexibility.

The Future

The COVID-19 response has been a truly extraordinary undertaking—unlike anything that most of us have ever experienced. The country’s medical experts, researchers and first responders have been heroic, but so too have the truck drivers, grocery stockers, checkers, port workers, train crews, oil workers and refineries that keep our energy flowing. And so have our faculty and staff. They have been doing an unbelievable job.

But, how might the future evolve? The coronavirus could die off much like the SARS virus in 2003, and we would return to a more routine day-to-day activity. In the second “future,” the virus continues to infect our population but at “manageable” rates and without overtaxing our medical community, and treatment drugs become available to spur rapid recovery. Social distancing becomes a normal part of our social fabric, and businesses open in ways appropriate to our economy and the protection of our health and well-being.

Our third scenario is a more troublesome path. After a drop-off in national and global contagion, a second wave of the virus erupts, and we enter another period of restrictions due to a dramatic uptick in mortal infections—nationwide and globally.

How Do We Prepare?

Our faculty will be preparing for fully online instruction over the summer—our worst case scenario. Course syllabi will be developed so each class is documented and “ready to roll.” Why is this important? With fully developed online capability, we can continue to deliver courses to move students toward graduation without interruption even in the most restrictive case of social distancing. In the horrible situation where a faculty member is unable to complete the semester’s instruction, an accurate roadmap will be available to continue the coursework so our students can carry on in a seamless way. Should a student present with symptoms part way through the semester, we still want the student to be able to access their coursework if they need to isolate away from campus. This will require discipline and hard work from each student, faculty and staff member. We pray this will not be necessary, but we will be prepared.

Online course offerings will be scheduled, and students will generally be expected to attend at the scheduled time (synchronous instruction). This allows single lines of communication, and students have the benefit of hearing questions and comments from other students in real time. The good news is that no one is able to snooze in the back of the class, so engagement will be high. Some online classes would be self-paced with frequent faculty interaction for maximum flexibility and engagement.

In the two other scenarios, we are proposing a hybrid solution, which will include reduced class size for social distancing. Class schedule will be adjusted to facilitate classroom cleaning several times throughout the day. We are looking at the most effective ways to sanitize our classrooms. We had already been planning what we refer to as “C-Hour” at mid-day as a no-class time to allow for student organizations to gather, various events to be scheduled and for students to have some additional time for relaxation and lunch. This new schedule could require us to have some classes on Friday, which we tried to avoid last semester, but that has not yet been decided. Smaller class sizes will likely necessitate such changes, and we may need to hire some additional faculty. We will have procedures in place depending on the severity of the virus. If we are still in a moderate restrictions phase, we will require masks, in addition to increased cleaning. Everyone will need to pitch in. We are well underway in our planning, and we feel our small size gives us huge flexibility. We can do this!

We expect many of our classes to be hybrid with some combination of in class and online course presentation. In every case, we will provide student counseling, faculty interaction and student learning and tutoring support. Our career services will be unabated, and we will work with employers to provide internships for our students to give them real-world experience—all with due regard to required restrictions. We are already helping our students learn to cope in a post-pandemic era with new approaches to interviewing for employment. We have done several rounds of mock interviews with our students. It has been educational and great fun.

This pandemic has underscored the value of a college education. This is not to undervalue any form of work. I believe all workers are “essential,” but as we look at the changing nature of work, now more than ever, we recognize the importance of a college education to prepare our students for professional paths and innovation in an increasingly digital world. I have been amazed at the quality and quantity of work we have been able to accomplish during this difficult time. It is a testament to ingenuity, discipline, skill and knowledge. This is what we desire for our students as well.

Athletic Programs

We don’t yet have all the answers we need for the fall start-up of our athletic programs. We know our athletes are “ready to rip,” but we have to do this in concert with other institutions in our conference if

we are to have a robust program of competition. We are fortunate the NAIA is committed to doing the right thing for our athletes. I have the pleasure of serving as president of the California Pacific Conference of the NAIA and have been in close contact with the commissioner of our conference. We are planning a (remote) meeting of the conference Council of Presidents on June 5. We expect to hammer out a plan that will meet our needs, provide for the safety of our student-athletes, and protect all parts of our MCU community. More details will be coming in the near future. Go Mariners!

The Villas

In the fall, our residential campus (The Villas) will be open, and we will be providing all single rooms at the lower double-room price. This gives us the greatest capability for either normal operations or a higher-intensity COVID environment. It will also be a great value for our residential students. We will have a number of isolation options at the Villas should that become necessary. Our residential townhouses are particularly well-suited should a student need to self-quarantine. Our units have kitchens, so students will be well taken care of and would be able to have a degree of independence in a quarantine situation. In short, we can do what few others can. Our Villas have 24-hour supervision and security. We are working with an internet and cellular provider to improve service at the Villas for routine usage and for the potential of increased online course offerings.

We will continue to run shuttles to campus when we have on-campus classes or activities. To be honest, our shuttle service is one of the biggest challenges. Shuttles will need to be operated with “social distancing,” and we will need to disinfect the shuttles after each “run.” We are looking at new technologies to do so. This will mean we need to operate more shuttles as the number of riders will be reduced to about a third per shuttle. We’re making progress, but still figuring it all out.

We are also re-examining our cafe and food services—moving away from salad bars and buffet-style meals and changing seating arrangements. Our small size allows us to be agile.

Our COVID-19 Task Force has been actively meeting since we first closed our campus on March 16. All campus departments are represented. The Task Force, led by Chairman Ryan Alcantara, meets at least once a week and stays in contact with government and health authorities on a daily basis through our Director of Student Wellness Osmara Reyes-Osorio.

Rest assured, we are exploring all avenues available to us for keeping our students and our Marymount community safe—including vulnerable members of our families.

Take care of yourselves and your loved ones.



Brian W. G. Marcotte
President
Marymount California University