



THOMAS M. EVANS, PhD
President

April 24, 2020

Dear Faculty, Students, Staff and Friends,

As this extraordinary month of April draws to a close and our attention remains focused on the global response to COVID-19, please allow me to provide an overview of UIW's response to the pandemic over the last several weeks, as well as some guidance as we look ahead.

While the pandemic has touched all of our lives and we are disappointed in having to spend the Spring 2020 semester apart, I am extremely proud of how our community responded in the transition to online learning and services for the health and wellbeing of others. Together, we demonstrated the importance of being One Word, a community united in our efforts to be of service to our students and one another. We also responded to the calls for action by city, state, and national leaders to act responsibly for the greater good of our city, state, country and world. When challenges arose, we strove to meet them, and when some demonstrated need, we sought to help.

I feel confident that UIW will emerge from the pandemic stronger than before because of our dedication to our Mission, values and charism given to us by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. One hundred and fifty years ago, our founders responded to an epidemic and have modeled purpose and compassion with their motto "a life for God and a heart for others" ever since.

From those early days, the Sisters' calling would grow to heal more, educate more and serve more. Likewise, UIW will move forward more resilient and better able to serve its community. As we continue to work to keep each other safe, healthy and academically on track, we must acknowledge the work and great effort put forth by our incident and emergency response teams, faculty, staff, and administration throughout the pandemic and going forward.

Before COVID-19

Prior to the discovery and spread of the coronavirus, UIW had established protocols to address and respond to critical issues. Sam McDaniel, director for Environmental Health, Safety, and Risk Management, coordinated regularly with San Antonio's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and San Antonio Metro Health.

Global Cases, No San Antonio Risk

As reports of cases continued to emerge globally, San Antonio remained at little to no risk. During this time, UIW's Core Incident Command (IC) team met regularly to consider and sketch contingency plans for UIW. Consisting of Sam McDaniel, Margaret Garcia, director of Communications and Brand

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Marketing, and Dr. Glenn James, associate provost, the IC team focused on planning for public health. The team soon expanded to include Dr. David Garza, UIW medical director, and Dr. Ronda Gottlieb, UIW clinical director. Following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and San Antonio Metro Health, decisions made in early March – such as the extension of Spring Break – established our priorities to proceed conservatively to protect our students' and employees' health. Departments and offices developed creative responses to pressing issues. Notably, International Affairs developed and conducted a week of seminars that allowed nearly 400 international students to maintain their F-1 visa status and stay on track with their degree plans.

Increased U.S. Risk

As information about virus outbreaks updated rapidly, the UIW Board of Trustees Executive Committee and I met at very short notice to consider and swiftly approve options to conduct Spring courses online and to move students out of residence halls. The IC team quickly prepared guidance, processes and forms to implement those challenging decisions. UIW was among the first in our region to declare studies “fully online” for the Spring term, and to begin moving students out of campus housing. Students moved swiftly, accepting these unexpected but necessary changes and supporting each other through the transitions. These difficult decisions proved to successfully protect our students and minimize the health risks for all. Simultaneously, we sought to provide housing and services for the very few students who required residence for the remainder of the term.

Increased San Antonio Risk

Shortly thereafter, the City of San Antonio began recommending stricter precautions. Thanks to the advice of our medical directors, and with the guidance of Dr. Gregory Steele, an epidemiologist on the School of Medicine faculty, and the insight of our experienced provost, Dr. Barbara Aranda-Naranjo, who previously helped lead the global response to HIV, UIW remained two to three days ahead of those requirements. The IC team expanded to include representatives from logistics, finance, residence halls, campus police, student services, international affairs, and athletics. Communications went out daily, through multiple channels, to share updates and guidance. Extensive support was mobilized to help students connect to UIW for distance learning, to provide all courses online, to support faculty in their preparations, and to deliver crucial student services in this new environment. Human Resources quickly prepared policies and guidance to allow employees to continue supervised work safely from home. Information Resources staff organized to support these transitions and assure the reliability of UIW's infrastructure to successfully continue.

In that time frame, crucial steps were taken to collect voluntary reporting of individual travel, and our medical team (supported by Institutional Research staff) contacted all UIW travelers, both students and employees, with guidance for safe home-monitoring depending on their destinations. This step alone helped keep UIW personnel safe during this fluid phase of the crisis.

In a matter of days, UIW promptly transitioned all operations off campus, and all courses online for the rest of Spring. The Information Resources team built web resources to keep our community informed, to widely share faculty development tools and contacts, and to receive information about individual travel. Dr. Susan Hall, director of UIW's Center for Teaching and Learning, and Kathy Bottaro, director of Instructional Technology Services, delivered a full week of workshops to help prepare faculty for the unexpected transition online.

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Sustained Operations

UIW's amazing faculty, staff, and administrators responded effectively to the urgent opening phase of the COVID-19 crisis. We gradually moved to a phase of more sustained activity, with almost all employees working from home, all students studying online, and the IC team meeting three times per week to respond promptly to operational needs and to plan contingencies for the months ahead. Sustained actions included, among many others:

- With incredibly short turn-around, Dr. Julie Nadeau and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee conceived of and designed all the details for a compassionate grading option, which allows Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grade requests for students during these turbulent Spring and Summer terms. Providing these additional grading options in the hope of reducing the stress caused by the abrupt transitions to online learning for students and faculty offers a fair alternative to our normal grading standards.
- Transitioning to online for all student recruiting and orientations for the incoming Fall 2020 class.
- Assessment of our progress, via a survey to faculty on their experiences in the online transition and a student survey requesting feedback to their instructors on strengths and challenges.
- Setting up a digital destination to receive any question from anyone in our community regarding the crisis and our response.
- Connecting continuously with countless other associations at the state, local and national levels, to share best practices and to contribute UIW's perspectives on next steps through numerous webinars, panel discussions, group calls, surveys and reports.
- Responding constructively to requests for events scheduled in various campus venues, from the McCombs Center Rosenberg Sky Room, to the Student Engagement Center, to our Concert Halls.
- Planning and organizing May 2020 Commencements in a virtual medium.
- Discontinuing all aspects of on-campus athletics, including practice, training and recruiting.
- Assuring safe work environments for those needing to work on campus—with good guidance, and provision of masks, as needed.
- Purchasing team working the challenge of ordering scarce protective equipment, needed for safe campus operations.
- Maintaining our undergraduate service requirement for graduation, and finding and establishing ways to conduct meaningful community service virtually and from home.
- Managing the complex accounting and refund of student room and board, due to campus evacuation.
- Adjusting our ongoing personnel searches due to necessary budget changes.
- Rallying pastoral and material needs for the vulnerable among our students, employees, and community.

Financial Considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic's financial impact will not be fully known for some time, but changes are already evident. We have refunded students' housing costs, issued reimbursements, established online payments and taken other measures recognizing uncertainties that come with these unprecedented times. As we strive to maintain the university's financial health in service to our students for the 2020-21 fiscal year, due to the uncertainty of the pandemic, salaries have been frozen for the 2020-21 fiscal year. A committee has been established to examine all open positions and make recommendations as to whether

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they should be filled or suspended based on their immediate and Mission-critical need. Considerable work is also underway planning multiple scenarios reflecting different revenue models.

Next Steps

The near-term dynamics of the virus remain to be seen, as testing increases and we learn more from those results. Under the leadership of the President's Cabinet, and advised by the IC team, UIW continues to prepare contingencies for the late Summer and Fall terms, cautiously optimistic that we may be able to prepare phases of safe return to in-person operations.

UIW has weathered financial challenges in the past and emerged more effective and efficient, and more prepared to handle what may come. While such a global and far-reaching impact as this pandemic is unprecedented, we are preparing for many eventualities, together.

I am sincerely grateful to our UIW community – to our students, faculty, staff, friends and supporters. Each of you, in your own way, has helped support us through challenges so expansive and which few could have anticipated. Leading UIW as its president during a transformational time in our world is a true privilege. I am reminded daily that there is no other community I'd rather be with on this journey.

Please join us in prayer for all those suffering from COVID-19, those caring for them and all who are affected by the implications of this pandemic, economic and otherwise.

Praised be the Incarnate Word!

Sincerely,



Thomas M. Evans, PhD
President