



May 15, 2020

Dear Lion Family:

In order to ensure the health and safety of its staff members, A&M-Commerce will begin returning administrative offices to on-site work in stages. These stages are set so that each one can be evaluated in conjunction with our local health authorities regarding the risk of contagion of COVID-19 before moving to the next stage. The plan set forth in this document is to give management and supervisors a framework to operate within and help make decisions for their respective areas.

Return to On-Site Work

The particular employees included in each of these stages or waves should be determined based on operational needs and managerial judgment, while remaining sensitive to the individual employee situations in each area. Employees who have raised a concern should return to on-site work only when their immediate issue (e.g., child or dependent care, underlying health concerns, risk factors, etc.) is resolved, their job duties change to where remote work is not possible, or when health authorities agree that a return to work no longer poses an immediate health risk. When determining the appropriate waves of staff returns, supervisors should exercise flexibility to address their employees' needs and safety concerns, taking into account physical and mental health, as well as family circumstances.

The goal for the campus to be fully operational with an on-site presence is August 1. There may be employees who are uncomfortable returning to work by this date due to personal concerns with the potential risk of infection. Again, those case-by-case situations should be discussed individually between the employee and manager to reach a satisfactory decision. In the earliest wave of returnees, no employee should be required to work on-site if they have valid health concerns until we can evaluate the results of expanding the number of employees working on-site.

Employees will be required to complete a training and certification through TrainTraq in SSO before being allowed to return to on-site work. The course numbers are 2114130: *Protocol and Certification for System Member Employees* and 2114131: *Safe Practices for Returning to the Office During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. These trainings will be assigned to all employees and must be taken prior to arrival on campus. Employees must forward the automated, successful acknowledgement emails from both trainings to their supervisors before returning. Essential employees who are already on campus need to take these courses before returning to campus next week.

Wave 1: In this first wave, a small number of additional employees identified by department managers can return to on-site work no earlier than May 18, 2020. The group of individuals who return in this first wave are most likely those who do not have health concerns, who do not have family circumstances that prevent them from leaving the home, who are needed for managerial priorities, or who have been unable to work effectively from a remote site.

The broad goal is to return about 25 percent of the workforce in a given area to on-site status beginning on, but no earlier than, May 18, inclusive of those already working on-site. It is recommended that staff wear face coverings when using common areas or attending in-person meetings or when social distancing is not possible. The University is working to procure facial coverings for faculty, staff, and students. You should continue to minimize in-person meetings as much as possible. All employees should continue to follow social distancing and meeting-size requirements provided by state health authorities.

Wave 2: In this second wave, an additional group of employees identified by department managers can return to on-site work no earlier than June 1, 2020, depending on the results of the preceding two weeks, not exceeding 50 percent of the workforce in a given area. The same guidelines on the use of face coverings, social distancing and meeting size apply, again consistent with public health guidance and good health safety processes.

Wave 3: No earlier than July 1, all remaining workers can return to on-site work, again presuming public health conditions do not change and we do not reconsider this decision. The same guidelines on the use of face coverings, social distancing and meeting size apply, again consistent with public health guidance and good health safety processes.

Examples of concerns that may be encountered are below and should be used as an aid to help managers make the best decisions for their areas.

Example 1. If an employee 65 years of age or older is notified to return to work, and they request to continue to work remotely because they could face an elevated risk from COVID-19 exposure on-site, the employer may approve the temporary workplace modification, according to CDC guidance.

Example 2. If an employee informs the employer that they have a disability that puts them at greater risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19, and they request an accommodation, such as continuing to work remotely, the employer may provide the accommodation if it would not pose an undue hardship. The employer can require verification that the employee has a disability and that the accommodation requested is needed.

Example 3. If an employee informs the employer that they have a valid health condition that puts them at greater risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19, and they request a temporary workplace modification, such as working remotely or a flexible work schedule, the employer may approve the temporary workplace modification if it would not impose an undue hardship.

Example 4. If an employee who is notified to return to work on-site informs the employer that they are unable to do so because their child's school is closed or child care is unavailable due to COVID-19 related reasons, the employer should allow the employee to continue to work remotely. If the employee is unable to work their full schedule, they may request leave in accordance with the FFCRA. The employee should document the leave appropriately in Workday.

Research Staffing

Laboratories and research-based spaces are unique to their associated purpose, project, number of participants and location; thus, decisions on return to laboratory-based research will be decided on a case-by-case basis, considering all safe work practices, including social distancing, face covering or respirator use and laboratory disinfection methods. These discussions should take place between the researcher, their department head, their dean, and the Vice President for Research and Economic Development.

Travel

Prior System guidance regarding travel remains in effect. No job-related international travel is permitted through May 31 unless it is directly critical to the ongoing international efforts to deal with COVID-19 or a waiver is granted by the President or his designee. No job-related domestic air travel is permitted unless deemed mission-critical, through May 31. All travel must be preapproved by the respective vice president for an area. We will revisit this travel guidance prior to May 31. Please visit the Stay Healthy Lions page, on the tab titled “A&M System Info” for updated guidance related to travel restrictions.

Sanitization and PPE

Efforts are underway to increase the frequency of sanitization with emphasis on high traffic areas, restrooms, residence halls, classrooms, and common areas. The University and SSC are working together to procure the necessary supplies and equipment for increased sanitization at all locations. This includes having additional supplies for faculty and staff use. Training and approvals will be required before employee use.

A final decision regarding the increased number of sanitizations will be contingent upon available product, CDC guidelines, System guidance, specific requirements for individual areas, and PPE availability. For areas where additional sanitization is impractical or unobtainable, consideration needs to be given for an alternate work location or course delivery, continued online practices, or delayed re-entry.

Children’s Learning Center

For many faculty and staff, returning to on-site work is dependent on the availability of childcare. The University is working with the Children’s Learning Center staff to open in the safest manner possible that takes into consideration the health and wellbeing of our staff and our families. Future plans for reopening will be shared as soon as they are available.

Athletics

A&M-Commerce is hopeful and will operate with the belief that we will resume athletics in the fall, although timing and final format will depend on a future evaluation of conditions and direction from the Lone Star Conference and the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Decisions related to practices and use of athletic facilities will be forthcoming.

Campus Recreation

Starting on May 18, some Campus Recreation outdoor spaces will reopen, as weather permits. This includes the Biking/Hiking Trail, Disc Golf Course, Hammock Groves, and Tennis Courts. No sports equipment checkout will be open at these locations during this phase of reopening. Social distancing should still take place in these outdoor areas. Although the State of Texas is allowing gyms to reopen May 18, the MRC will not reopen at this time. Until the MRC reopens, staff is working diligently to implement a plan that follows local and state guidance to keep our staff and patrons as safe as possible.

Use of Facilities by External Groups

Use of university facilities by external groups (e.g., high school graduations) should not resume any earlier than June 15 and then only when expectations of social distancing and crowd sizes (occupancy levels) are equal to what is allowed in restaurants, etc. are met.

External Visitors

External guests may be invited to physically attend meetings at the university no earlier than June 1 and should be expected to observe guidance related to social distancing, meeting size and face coverings in place at the time of the visit. Invited external guests should be limited to mission-critical functions such as interviews for positions. Additional guidance related to visitors after June 1 will be provided as information is made available and evaluations are made related to the first wave of return.

Fall Semester

Fall semester planning will occur with an unwavering commitment to the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff, and in pursuit of the highest academic quality in our teaching, research and service. With those foundational commitments at the forefront, A&M-Commerce plans to open our campuses to face-to-face instruction this fall (August) unless evidence or directives dictate otherwise. We will do so responsibly, assuring as best we are able to enhance the safety of students, faculty, and staff, especially those who are at higher risk from COVID-19, making informed decisions on classes, activities, and residential living, and remaining flexible to adjust as needed. We will use all instructional tools at our disposal to deliver the best quality educational experience for our students, while protecting everyone's safety and wellbeing.

With that said, it is clear that Fall 2020 will not look like Fall 2019. Representatives comprised of faculty and staff are working on detailed issues associated with Fall courses. There is also a group representing the Chief Academic Officers, in cooperation with System public health experts, working on the detailed issues associated with reopening our campuses. More details will be available when they are ready.

Conclusion

Our overall goal is to have an intentional plan to return slowly to normal operations on-site, which we all recognize could take months to fully realize. In the meantime, we want to begin a return of more normal operations in a thoughtful and careful way. Further guidance will be provided in the weeks to come.

If you have comments or questions related to health or safety, please email eoc@tamuc.edu. If you have questions related to your employment situation, please discuss with your supervisor. In the case your question is not resolved with your supervisor, please email hr@tamuc.edu.

Sincerely,



Mark Rudin
President