

**From:** [Douglas Houston](#)  
**To:** [Douglas Houston](#)  
**Subject:** End of Semester Updates and Musings  
**Date:** Friday, May 15, 2020 4:00:28 PM

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Greetings colleagues,

I hope this email finds you and your loved ones well and hopefully you are winding down a bit during finals week.

We all have much to celebrate at today's Commencement exercises. In my weekly video [update](#) I express my appreciation for all your hard work that led to our students' success; the graduation numbers reflect that most did accomplish their education goals. I also talk about the summer soft reopen and the plan for a schedule that will allow staff to have some well-earned 'down time' amidst the preparations.

This is a two-part email.

### **Part 1**

In the first part, I want to again commend your amazing work this semester as we prepare to honor our graduates tonight in virtual Commencements. Their accomplishments are your accomplishments; thank you for sticking through this wild and crazy ride with and for them. They could not have succeeded without your best efforts and you gave that and then some.

I expect that this has been the most trying semester of any of our careers. In the coming weeks and months we still have a lot of work to do in preparation for the Summer term and the next Academic Year. I encourage all of us to take some time off. In my previous career we called this a "Stand Down." The next several weeks especially, please take time for yourselves and your families. You have sacrificed much in the past months, for a noble cause and with remarkable success; now is the time to give a little back to yourselves. As we prepare for some re-opened services during the Summer Term, we will adjust the work week hours to encourage our staff to take some additional down time. Rest; you've earned it.

This time of year in the past I have commented on various historic and annual events we would have been observing – tomorrow is Armed Forces Day and the anniversary of the founding of the U.S. Army (Happy Birthday Army). Earlier this month we observed both the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of "VE Day" and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kent State shootings; as the child of a WW II veteran and a college student in the 70s, this poses a poignant contrast. But I find it hard this year to summon the focus to contemplate these anniversaries in light of what we've endured. I ask you to join me nevertheless especially in reflecting on the impact of these events have had on our lives, whether directly or indirectly, especially as we approach Memorial Day in a few weeks.

Annual rhythms continue despite the disruption.

In the past two Board meetings we have welcomed numerous newly-tenured faculty, honored all faculty with National Teacher Appreciation Week, all nurses and medical paraprofessionals with

Life goes on. We are strong, we endure and we even thrive in the face of adversity.

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The second part of this email is a lengthy musing is dedicated to the discussion earlier this week regarding communications and our decisions for the Summer and Fall terms. The rest of this is pretty lengthy email because I appreciate, and want to respond diligently, to those recent email requests for clarity and improved communications. If you don't have time to read any further than this – here is the 'bottom line up front.'

Please look for other forthcoming end-of-semester and Summer preparatory communications regarding specific preparation activities, campus soft reopening dates and guidelines for returning to some face-to-face services.

With respect to communications

I do appreciate the recent email discussions regarding pandemic planning communications. The questions, comments and concerns reflect the challenges with communicating during a crisis. Over the past nearly three months (yes, it's been nearly three months) we have substantially increased the volume and types of communications in an effort to solicit input and ensure clarity in decision-making: (1) we have a dedicated [District COVID-19 website](#), and I have asked for your suggestions on how to improve the websites to improve communications; the Colleges have also expanded communications on their respective websites and would likewise appreciate your insight on how to

improve them; (2) the College Presidents, Vice Presidents and I have published email communiques to faculty and staff and to students, in some cases multiple weekly and these emails are all archived on the District COVID-19 website; (3) the Colleges are using the student apps to publish information regarding various decisions and campus status; (4) on behalf of the District Emergency Response Team, Foundation Director Jay Lowden has been sending regular status updates, often multiple per week and these emails are all archived on the District COVID-19 website; (5) I have recorded a weekly video blog and published those with my email updates and linked them on the District COVID-19 website; (6) we have been holding weekly Town Hall meetings highlighting pandemic response work, communicating decisions, and responding to suggestions and questions, these are all recorded and archived on the District COVID-19 website; and (7) we have published media releases to local newspapers, copies of which are also archived on the District COVID-19 website.

That said, we are all busy and I fully appreciate that it is difficult for many to keep up with all of these communiques. Increasing the volume of communications doesn't commensurately improve clarity. For example, we know that not all our students even read their emails or access the college apps; some don't even have access. This is why **we have redundantly communicated student information to you through email and the websites – so that you can answer students questions with confidence.** We certainly can and will improve the use of websites and the student apps to improve communications to students but I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the herculean effort by many college and district leaders to develop and engage in the various communications strategies listed above – I am particularly thankful for all the work that many put in to the Town Halls, the websites and the numerous detailed emails and guidance memos. It was a remarkable effort by many faculty, administrators and staff leaders and reflects YCCD's strong collaborative spirit!

I also appreciate those of you who have reached out directly to me with recommendations, concerns and questions – I have responded to each individually and we have repeated those responses in subsequent district-wide communique or Town Hall sessions assuming others have the same questions. Despite the increased volume and multiple modes, it is clear that we can improve communications and are committed to doing so. We can especially improve the use of the District and College websites. So I say again, thank you to all of you who have highlighted the imperative to do so.

#### With respect to decision clarity

In terms of the decisions regarding Summer and Fall – let me clarify any remaining misunderstandings. We have announced the decision for Summer Semester in a March 25, 2020 email to all faculty and staff and commented on it in a subsequent Town Hall session. That decision was to publish the Summer schedule as it was at the time with its at-the-time mix of face-to-face and distance ed classes. In that same district-wide communique and in subsequent college-level planning meetings and communique we communicated that faculty should continue work to transition face-to-face classes to distance education modes. A short digression on vocabulary – at that time we were using the term "remote education" at the time, as was our System office and many other colleges in the context of "emergency remote instruction;" since then as the CA CC System we have shifted the expectation that classes could be taught via "emergency remote instruction" to requiring that Summer and Fall classes not taught face-to-face had to comply with

State and Federal Distance Ed policies and ACCJC standards.

In an April 24, 2020 district-wide email I reiterated this decision and expressed that both Summer term and Fall Semester would be a mix of distance education and face-to-face (those would be in compliance with local social distancing directives). In that email I explained the reasons for this decision. First that our rural counties were lower risk of Coronavirus transmission and, in consultation with local county health officials, we had good reason to assume that the state-wide and local stay-at-home directives would be at least partially lifted by the start of the Summer semester. Second that unlike many other colleges and universities who were deciding to move fully online, many of the students our colleges serve are not equipped to succeed in online learning. Notwithstanding students' level of preparation to succeed in online modalities, many of our impoverished rural communities lack stable internet and cell phone access. Even though we could, and did, loan student laptops and mobile hotspots, many were still unsuccessful in distance education. This is the very reason we kept key operations open on campuses – to provide students access to services and infrastructure essential for their success.

Moreover, we heard from faculty that not all classes, and especially not all labs, could be successfully transitioned to distance ed modalities. Lastly, I stated in that email that while we had made the decision to reopen face-to-face classes for Summer semester, we would reevaluate that decision on June 1; that if, by two weeks prior to the term start, it did not look like local county health officers would be recommending reopening classrooms then we would direct all classes transition to distance ed. I also listed some of the many steps that we would be undertaking in the upcoming weeks to prepare for reopening campuses and returning to face-to-face instruction including “provisions for social distancing, additional cleaning, possibly the wearing masks, and moving some classes into large spaces to allow for distancing.” That work is currently underway and you absolutely should be engaged in college-level, campus-level and department-level brainstorming on how to best serve students and one another safely, with ‘safely’ being defined by county health guidance for each campus.

I received many questions about this April 24 communique. This is what continues to vex me about the use of email - I fall prey to truncating my messages out of a fear that the longer they are, the less likely they will be read ... this one for example. So in response to those questions – in subsequent video blogs and Town Hall sessions, I clarified that the March 24 instructions still applied – that every effort should be made to transition to distance ed any and all classes that should be, particularly those that were not conducive to social distancing. I also restated that the reason for making the decision as early as we did (we announced it over seven weeks before the start of the Summer term) was to provide ample time to prepare. Those preparations include assessing which classes could be accommodated face-to-face (facilities), which must be taught face-to-face (mandates), which should be taught face-to-face (curricular) and which could be taught via the various distance ed modalities (online, hybrid, broadcast, etc.). Preparations also include preparing facilities including the installation of sneeze shields at student services counters, marking floors where student queue, moving classes to larger classrooms or across multiple classrooms connected with technology, the deep cleaning classroom and acquiring additional cleaning equipment and supplies for repeated cleaning, etc. All of this with the expectation that if a class could not be accommodated with what we anticipated to be the required social distancing, then that class would be transitioned. That said,

as our counties and state progress in reopening it seems increasingly likely that the social distancing protocol may be modified, or even replaced in some circumstances, with a directive for the wear of facial coverings instead.

So let me reiterate the decisions we've made regarding Summer and Fall instruction. Because most of our communities are lower risk to Coronavirus and will be leading the reopening from the State-wide stay-at-home directives and because many of our students are not equipped to succeed in distance education – we decided to reopen to a mix of face-to-face and distance education classes for Summer and for Fall and each campus will follow the respective county public health guidance. Additionally, some specific programs may also have unique health guidance from their external regulatory agencies. These decisions were announced in emails in March and April and discussed in subsequent video blogs and Town Hall sessions. We will re-evaluate those decisions two weeks prior to the start of each term in the event local county public health guidance would preclude reopening classrooms. The college administration and appropriate staff, and District Services administration and staff, are currently discussing soft reopening dates for student and administrative services, again based on guidelines from local county health officials.

My thanks to all of you who have read this to the end. Thanks again to all who have commented on the email thread that YC Professor Brian Condrey started, including of course Brian's opening comments. We can and will improve communications including especially the use of the District and College websites. Please attend the Town Hall sessions; please use the [District COVID-19 website](#) and forward any suggestions for improvement.

Thank you

**Dr. Douglas B. Houston, Chancellor**

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