

**REMARKS
PRESIDENT MOREHEAD TO THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 2020**

Good afternoon. We are here today in response to a petition to convene a special called meeting of the University Council. The sole purpose of today's meeting is to address two resolutions pertaining to the reopening of campus for class this Fall Semester.

Before we begin the process of presenting and deliberating these resolutions, I would like to speak to a few of the issues that will undoubtedly be debated today.

The University System of Georgia began a planning process in April to reopen all campuses for Fall Semester and asked each institution to prepare reopening plans. The health and safety of our faculty, staff and students have always been foremost in our planning efforts. I take deep personal offense at any claim or insinuation otherwise.

Our University community is indebted to the dedicated efforts of nine working groups—comprised of nearly 140 faculty and staff—to develop a comprehensive plan for the gradual and phased reopening of our campus. That plan, along with those of the other 25 University System of Georgia institutions, was adopted by the Board of Regents. We first made this comprehensive, 225-page plan available to the campus community on June 9, and have shared it broadly since that time.

We have been following the plan over the course of the entire summer, while remaining flexible as we have slowly, gradually, reopened campus in a careful and thoughtful manner as our knowledge of the coronavirus and best practices has evolved. However, not until July 28, nearly two months after the campus plan was published and just two weeks away from our full return in Phase 3, did any faculty body step forward with concerns. I have responded in writing to the Franklin College and the Early College, as has Chancellor Wrigley.

Some will say that our planning over the summer did not involve faculty. That is false. The nine working groups involved well over 30 members of our faculty. The only bodies that remain in operation as our students return to campus this week are faculty-driven:

First, the Medical Oversight Task Force for COVID-19, led by Dr. Garth Russo of the University Health Center, along with Deans Shelley Nuss, Lisa Nolan and Marsha Davis. This body has recommended our surveillance testing plan and the DawgCheck notification tool, among other important steps.

Second, the Preventative Measures Advisory Board, co-led by Dean Nolan and Environmental Safety Associate Vice President John McCollum. Ten of its 13 members are members of our faculty—technical experts in infectious disease, medicine, and public health. They are advising the senior administration and colleges and units on monitoring and mitigation efforts.

At this late stage, I think it would be highly inappropriate and counter-productive for the University Council to manage or mandate a so-called “Ad-Hoc University Council COVID-19 Response Committee” to interact with either of these groups. In addition, I would argue that it is outside the University Council’s purview to do so. While the Council has general legislative power, legislative authority does not allow you to become “a stakeholder” and member of the administration, as the administrative committees the President appoints, using the authority delegated by the Board of Regents, are created to carry out the duties of the office. Faculty with particular expertise will continue to provide guidance from these two groups mentioned earlier. I would also point out that we regularly report on the work of these groups to the campus community. We distribute multiple emails weekly with updates on our reopening.

I want to publicly commend all of these individuals who have worked on our plans, as well as all of those who have worked tirelessly and constructively over the summer to maintain essential operations and prepare, to the best of our abilities, for our fall return. We have invested millions of dollars in health and safety measures to help protect our campus community against the spread of COVID-19. To name just a few:

- We have put plans in place for surveillance testing.
- We have activated DawgCheck, a symptom checker and notification system.
- We have installed hand sanitizing stations and wipe stations.
- We have produced mandatory training videos for faculty, staff and students.
- We have strengthened cleaning protocols.
- We provided two face coverings and a thermometer for all of our faculty, staff and students.
- And I would remind everyone that wearing face coverings is now mandatory whenever someone is in a classroom or a building on campus.

In addition, nearly every classroom on our campus has been measured and marked to provide appropriate social distancing, and plexiglass barriers are being installed, where appropriate, at lecterns or desks to allow safe interaction between faculty and students. I would add that the painter’s tape that some of you may have seen on misleading social media posts is not permanent. The tape is applied to secure the plexiglass until the adhesive glue has completely set.

I would also note that the institution has approved accommodations for every eligible faculty member and graduate student who has requested one. To date, more than 370 classes have moved online to accommodate those faculty and graduate students, and many other classes are online as well or have been modified into a hybrid format to ensure that social distancing can be maintained. We are an institution that prides itself on the strength of our teaching, and I would hope that all of you would agree that being on campus offers a deeper and more well-rounded learning experience.

I am hearing from more and more students and parents who are excited about returning to campus and resuming some sort of a new normalcy. Our dining halls open tomorrow, and our students move into our residence halls on Friday. By the way, some of you may have heard individuals claiming that our decision to reopen for the fall is due to pressure from a third-party vendor controlling our housing. They are wrong. There are no Corvias facilities on

this campus. The University owns and operates all of our residence halls under the purview of our Vice President for Student Affairs.

We have been very, very fortunate so far financially. Because we had built up our reserves over the years through careful and thoughtful budgeting, we were prepared to weather a crisis of this nature when it happened in March. We shut down our auxiliary operations like housing, dining and parking, and provided refunds to our students without any of our people losing their jobs. Those reserves are now gone. We received some assistance from the federal CARES Act funding, but all of those options have been exhausted.

We have more than 1,100 positions on this campus that are tied directly to our students being on campus and using services that are provided on campus. The situation is compounded by the fact that beginning on July 1, the University was hit with a 10 percent state budget reduction. Again, we managed by focusing on preserving things that matter to student learning, as well as preserving jobs for our employees. But we are by no means through this crisis. If we were to move fully online, there is no question that there would be layoffs. Anyone who contends otherwise is either ill-informed or being deceptive.

We must accept that the pandemic is going to be with us a while—perhaps throughout the coming academic year and perhaps even longer. The institution must find a way to operate in light of this new normal. The decisions that this institution has made over the course of the summer have been more complex and difficult than any I have ever encountered in my more than 30 years as a faculty member and administrator on this campus. There are no simple answers. But despite the claims of some, I believe everyone who has been involved in reopening our campus has acted with good faith and concern for all.

I realize that this is an anxious time for all of us. I will also be in the classroom, teaching an FYO Seminar, as I have done every fall as University President. I will ask that my students wear their face coverings and follow social distancing guidelines, but I am committed to providing them with a meaningful in-person learning experience.

I hope it is apparent to the members of this body that we have employed numerous strategies to reduce risk, recognizing that we cannot eliminate it. We will continue to follow the guidance of the University System of Georgia and public health experts as we move forward throughout the fall.

We owe it to our students and to our state to persevere. By working together, we will.

Thank you.