

Update on COVID-19

It should come as no surprise to hear that SIUC is doing contingency planning in response to COVID-19. Most of you will have received an email asking about the possibility of transferring your classes to D2L. Earlier this afternoon I met with administrative leaders to discuss options they are considering. They are meeting regularly with a team on campus and consulting with other Illinois public universities and the governor's office. I was told to expect that the chancellor will send out an update on COVID-19 planning by tomorrow.

At the state level, the IEA was involved in a conference call among leading stakeholders. An IEA "guidance" document resulting from that meeting can be found [here](#). I will post all future "guidances" on our website (and flag them on [our facebook page](#), where I provide more routine updates than I do via email).

In the meeting this afternoon, I encouraged the administration to work with union and constituency group leaders representing instructional staff to ensure any transfer of on-campus teaching to a DE (distance education) format goes as smoothly as possible. I noted that some classes cannot be transferred in this way, something the administrators were already cognizant of. I urged them to be flexible and realistic about what can be done to go online on short notice, and to encourage instructors to make a good faith effort to transfer courses online, if it comes to that, rather than issuing inflexible requirements that all faculty transfer courses intact. I think they understand the basic issues, and am encouraged that they reached out to consult with us.

Here are some suggestions to consider.

- As you inform your administrative superior about how practicable it would be to transfer your courses to a distance education format, also make clear to them any training, resources, equipment or other support you would need to transfer your courses successfully.
- If any of your courses cannot practicably be transferred to a distance education format, be prepared to say, briefly, why they cannot.
- If it is practicable to move your classes online, consider taking preliminary steps now to prepare to make that move.

— Note that the best way to transfer classes may *not* be to attempt a literal translation of on-campus to DE mode of instruction. Where responsible to do so, you may need to shift not only the mode of delivery but assignments, learning objectives, etc. Be prepared to think creatively.

— Be realistic about what you and your students can do via DE, if we are forced to employ that mode. The goal would be to do our best to provide students with a quality educational experience for the remainder of the semester, not to replace everything we would have done on campus.

— Be aware that some students may lack ready access to high-speed internet service if campus is shut down.

- If on-campus courses do continue, consider revising or clarifying your attendance policies to ensure students do not feel pressured to attend class in person if they have flu-like symptoms, or have been in close contact with others who have such symptoms. Be prepared to communicate relevant policies to your students clearly, and encourage them not to take any steps which would endanger their health, or the health of others in your class (including you). I have encouraged the administration to be similarly flexible with faculty sick leave.

- Be aware that [the CDC](#) has advised that COVID-19 is most dangerous for older adults (a category sometimes said to start at 60, which will of course apply to many faculty), and to those with serious underlying health issues (which will also apply to many students—in many cases without faculty having any knowledge which students fall into this category). Such individuals may need special accommodations if on-campus teaching continues.

- By all means take care of your own health, and refrain from coming to campus if you have flu-like symptoms yourself, or are living with or caring for someone with such symptoms.

I think we will all do our best to work together to help SIUC face this crisis. But if you feel that unreasonable requests are being made of you by the administration, please get in touch. Send an email addressed to both me at dmj2@me.com and our IEA Uniserv Director Aldo Migone at aldo.migone@ieanea.org. As is generally true with other, more usual campus issues, FA intervention would aim at resolving issues, not exacerbating them. In particular, please contact us if any of the following apply:

- You believe that your supervisor is asking you to take steps which would compromise your health or that of your students.

- You believe that your supervisor is asking you to take steps which would be pedagogically irresponsible, even given the constraints imposed by the need to prioritize health.
- You believe that your supervisor is modifying or increasing your workload in ways not clearly justified by the crisis.

Prompt communication about such problems can help us resolve them so that they do not stand in the way of a wise, coordinated response should COVID-19 affect this campus.

Finally, here are some links online that may be of interest.

[SIU page on COVID-19](#)

[Illinois Department of Public Health](#) on COVID-19

The [CDC page on COVID-19](#)

An AAUP [statement on COVID-19](#) and their [resource page on COVID-19](#)

[NEA page on COVID-19](#) (K-12 centered, but much of relevance)

[SIUC CTE page](#) with links to [tutorials on D2L](#) and help with [Echo360](#) (video lecture platform).

Chronicle of Higher Education [introduction to online teaching](#).

Crises like this can bring out the worst as well as the best in people (I am currently teaching Thucydides, who is not an optimist about such matters). But most of what I have seen thus far makes me cautiously optimistic that the state government and campus leadership are approaching this responsibly, and preparing us as well as possible to get through this crisis.

In solidarity,

Dave Johnson
President, SIUC-FA