

**From:** Bethel University <[covid-19@bethel.edu](mailto:covid-19@bethel.edu)>

**Subject:** COVID-19 Update: Fall Plans and Financial Update

[PreferredName]—

Last week, I spent time with our colleagues who are working diligently to prepare for our virtual commencement gatherings. In the midst of disrupted plans, change, and uncertainty, these preparations provided a much needed reminder—each of us matters to God, and our work matters. While we will celebrate differently than any of us imagined, I am grateful for the time to honor the miracles that are our students—and the part all of you play in their journeys.

As we near the end of the semester and fiscal year, I want to share with you some important updates and information:

**We are eagerly planning for students to return to campus this fall.**

We have already begun drafting a phased approach for employees to return to campus—with the first group given the option to return June 1—in order to allow us to prepare for the fall. More information regarding when various groups of employees will be allowed to return to campus will be provided by May 22.

While we don't know with certainty what the fall will look like, we are actively preparing for a scenario that would allow us to resume face-to-face education. We are grateful for guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Higher Education, and our colleagues at the other private colleges in Minnesota. Our planning is focused on three areas:

1. Developing plans for **density and social distancing** throughout the campus, including classrooms, residence halls, Chapel, athletics, large social events, offices, etc.
2. Preparing for **virtual learning environments** that give us the flexibility to adapt to a variety of face-to-face scenarios.
3. Revamping our **health and safety measures**, including plans for self-isolation in the case of illness, residence hall expectations, cleaning products and schedules, etc.

More information about the working groups, including membership, goals, and timelines, will be available on the COVID-19 website in the coming weeks.

**Enrollment outlook for the fall**

I am incredibly grateful for the work of our admissions and marketing teams—along with many others—as they have worked to continue to recruit students in this virtual environment. In the College of Arts & Sciences, our new student projections for the fall have been trending behind last year by about 20% since December. However, as of last week, our latest projections are about 15% behind last year. While we do not expect to fully close that gap, the innovative work our colleagues have done—from creating virtual tour visits to making social media connections—has allowed us to make up some ground during this season.

While it is too early to begin projecting fall enrollment in our post-traditional programs, summer enrollment for Bethel Seminary is pacing behind, while the College of Adult & Professional Studies and the Graduate School look strong. Early data indicates that retention in all of our schools is up from last spring.

### **Necessary adjustments in response to our fiscal reality**

While we certainly did not anticipate a global pandemic as we developed plans to position Bethel for a strong future, the budget adjustments we made over the last year have better prepared us for the fiscal challenges created by COVID-19. Unfortunately, student refunds and operating adjustments related to COVID-19 have resulted in an additional \$4.5 million in lost revenue this year—bringing our overall FY20 operating budget \$6-7 million short. To address this shortfall and its implications for FY21, we will make the following adjustments:

- A university-wide hiring freeze will be in place until further notice. Only positions deemed essential will be filled.
- Effective August 1, we will decrease the Defined Contribution Retirement Plan contribution from 5% to 2%. We have considered other options, such as furloughs, an across-the-board pay decrease, and additional personnel reductions. However, given the economic challenges many families are facing, our goal is to prioritize decisions that have a limited immediate effect on household income. Cabinet sees reinstating the retirement benefit in some form as a top priority for the future.
- As previously announced, there will not be a salary increase for FY21.
- Through December 31, any university-sponsored travel by faculty must be essential and approved by the provost. University-sponsored travel by staff must be essential and approved by the appropriate Cabinet member.
- Any department spending over \$2,500 must be approved by the appropriate Cabinet member.
- Except for approved projects that ensure the safety, security, and essential maintenance of our campus, project spending will be deferred until further notice. Work on the science addition will continue through completion, in part because it is donor-funded.
- We will use our endowment to the extent that it is feasible and consistent with our fiscal and stewardship responsibilities. Most of our endowment funds are legally designated for specific purposes and cannot be repurposed.

In closing, we want our continuing and incoming students to know one thing: we are ready for them. We remain committed to providing an academically excellent education that prepares them to lead and serve wherever God calls. Although these trying times make our work more challenging than ever, President-elect Allen and I are grateful to partner with you in this mission—for God's glory and our neighbors' good.

-Jay

Jay Barnes

President

Bethel University  
3900 Bethel Drive  
St. Paul, MN 55112