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### Message from the President

Georgia Southern University

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# Dear Colleagues,

April 27, 2020

As we move into the final week of classes and prepare for finals in this spring semester, I want to send my monthly update a few days early so I can provide you with real-time information on current and future topics, and plans.

But first, let me say, thank you. As I said to our students, I want to say thank you to you, our faculty and staff, for responding to this situation with a positive attitude and a can-do spirit that has come to define Eagle Nation. Every day I am hearing how you are innovating, adapting, excelling, and finding new ways to educate our students and to better yourself and your communities. And most of all, how you are contributing to our hope for a future beyond COVID 19. Thank you! And I'm so grateful to be your president!

So, where are we today and what's next...

- **Governor's Executive Order** – Throughout the COVID-19 response, University System of Georgia (USG) leadership has been in constant contact with the Governor's Task Force and with the Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) for guidance. We will continue to rely on these sources to establish the standards we should follow to help protect our faculty, staff and students and to help the state's effort to contain the virus. As of today, what we know is that the governor's recent executive orders do not change our current operations here at Georgia Southern. We will finish this semester strong and continue this summer delivering our curriculum fully online.
- **Summer semester and opportunities for students** – This summer may be the best time for students to further their progress toward their degree. We have reduced all mandatory fees for the summer semester to only the institutional fee and technology fee, and with the elimination of undergraduate eTuition differential, summer classes may be the best value ever. Please encourage students to consider summer classes! In addition, there will be no tuition increases for next academic year!
- **CARES Act Emergency Grant Aid for students** – To assist our students in the midst of this public health crisis, the Federal Government recently passed the CARES Act, which included emergency grant funding for our students who find themselves facing financial hardships as a result of COVID-19. We are currently working with

state and federal officials to get this money directly to our students as quickly as possible. Look for more communication in the coming days from the university on how and when this money will be distributed to our students. Information will also be shared at <https://www.georgiasouthern.edu/covid-19-information/cares/>.

- **Virtual Commencement Ceremonies May 8 and 9 and tentative dates for a summer face-to-face makeup** – For now, with social distancing guidelines still in place, we cannot yet reschedule any events such as graduation. We continue to make plans in anticipation of the day when we can set a date for the in-person graduation ceremony. In the interim, we will celebrate our student's accomplishments during the virtual graduation that will air on May 8 and 9. Please visit the Georgia Southern [commencement website](#) to find the time when each college's ceremony will air, and if for some reason the specific time to watch doesn't align with your schedule, the entire ceremony will be saved on our website to watch at your convenience. The virtual commencement ceremony is just one example of how we have adapted and innovated in the face of this pandemic!
- **Fall reopening and initial faculty/staff return to campus** – In anticipation of a resumption of in-person instruction in August 2020, University System of Georgia (USG) institutions will begin to bring faculty and staff who have been in telework or flexible arrangements back to their campuses in the near future. An exact timeframe will be determined soon. To ensure a smooth transition and to limit the spread of COVID-19, institutions are being asked to develop a plan for a staggered return of faculty and staff. The plan must promote a healthy and safe environment, comply with Executive Orders and directives from the Governor's office, and reflect guidance from the Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations. Everyone must understand that the COVID-19 situation is fluid, and therefore guidance will very likely change over time, even after plans are prepared and adopted. Georgia Southern is currently working on these initial plans with a submittal deadline of May 25 to the USG for approval. At this point, there is much we do not know about what state directives will be in place when the workforce starts to return and later when in-person instruction resumes. We will regularly seek guidance from GDPH throughout the coming weeks and months. We will keep you posted and updated as these plans progress on our [COVID-19 information webpage](#).
- **Budget** – The USG continues to work with the Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) as they assess state revenue losses in the current FY20 amended budget and revenue projections into FY2021. Though there is not an official hiring freeze in place, we have been and continue to be in a critical hiring review process, which began last December. In addition, we are monitoring all end-of-year expenses to ensure we are able to adapt to any realization of current year revenue shortfalls. The FY2021 Budget will not be voted on and resolved until the legislative session meets again before the end of the fiscal year. We must assume and prepare for some reduction in funding. In this exercise, as we have done in the past, we will continue to prioritize efficiencies in travel, operations, and current vacancies. As always, we will keep you posted and will be transparent in all of our budget decisions!

Finally, I want to say that while there is a lot of uncertainty in our country right now, you can be sure of one thing — your university is equipped to deal with these issues and prepare for the future. Most importantly, even as a large institution, we still know the importance of

making personal connections and caring for the needs of our people and our community. At Georgia Southern, we have a history of rolling up our sleeves and getting the job done. We must continue to make all decisions in alignment with and based on our values and our vision — People. Purpose. Action: Growing ourselves to grow others! It is our people that educate and help transform the lives of our students. We will make it through all of this together!

Sincerely,  
Kyle

## Georgia Southern University

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*Growing ourselves to grow others*

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