

GSBS Town Hall Meeting
Friday, May 1, 2020 11:30 AM
via Zoom

Dean Schneider welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Dr. Schneider updated the group on the current stats of students on campus: Less than 10% of students are currently on campus; Lubbock has a more flattened curve as opposed to Amarillo and Abilene. This will enable the Lubbock campus to move to Phase III allowing the clinical operations back on campus. Phase III will begin May 18, 2020, where there will be a single point of entry on campus where temperature will be taken. **Face masks are required to be worn by everyone on campus at all times and attestation forms must be completed prior to coming to campus.** *Please note: Students will be required to have their own face masks, they will not be provided by the institution or GSBS.*

When in Phase II: each department will be required to have thermometers. Dr. Byrd is trying to find out if TTUHSC will be purchasing in bulk. She will keep Dr. Schneider posted. Dr. Schneider emphasized that students would only return to campus if they felt safe to do so. If a student feels they are being forced to return, please contact him so the issue can be resolved. For the safety of everyone, Dr. Schneider asked the students not to come to campus if they were not feeling well or were running a fever.

Online instruction will continue, even while in Phase II. Administration is hopeful that students may return to campus on July 6th. Dr. Rice-Spearman will make the final decision in late May based on each individual campus and program.

Update on Graduation: May Graduates will receive a commemorative box which will include their diploma. A tribute video will be streaming online on May 22. A graduation ceremony has been tentatively rescheduled for the morning of July 31st.

Dr. Schneider reminded the PhD second year students that their Degree Plans were due by the end of the Spring semester. Please turn them in to Sophia.

Additional Updates:

Pharmaceutical Sciences in Abilene: Dr. Srivastava will keep 30% staffing and is preparing for a screening process; they will be providing masks to students.

Pharmaceutical Sciences in Amarillo: Dr. Abbruscato stated that Amarillo campus will operate at 10% at most. There has been an increase in cases and he will keep this in consideration as he goes into discussions on the reopening timeline. They will delay students returning to campus until the number of cases start to decline.

Public Health in Abilene: Dr. St. John let the group know that Abilene has the 4th fastest infection rate in the US, so they are continuing their efforts to keep students and staff safe.

Public Health in Lubbock: Dr. Byrd said classes will continue online for the Summer semester. They are currently discussing the possibility of a hybrid schedule for the future.

Dr. Min Kang stated Lubbock COVID-19 cases had been less than 10 per day with not many community breakouts and most of the Lubbock cases started in nursing homes. In Lubbock, housekeeping and mail delivery are on campus, however it was encouraged to only purchase necessary supplies at this time and to keep orders to a minimum.

Dr. Blanton updated everyone on the new MD/PhD and PhD students starting this summer. The incoming students will have a Zoom orientation and they will do a virtual rotation in June. The on-campus July 6th return date will remain tentative.

Dr. Schneider congratulated all the students that had defended and presented their Qualifying Exams recently. Everyone has been successful and the zoom presentations have been well attended.

This year, enrollment for the Fall will be down, particularly the PhD program; Graduate Medical Education Sciences, Biotechnology and Public Health have not had much decline. One factor that may have impacted admissions this year is the GRE requirement. The GRE requirement for admission will be discussed at the May faculty meeting.

Dr. Schneider assured the students that funds are still available to continue supporting their Research Assistant salary's. Other resources are also available to the students.

Marcus Wilson, TTUHSC Director of Financial Aid, discussed the CAREs Act. HSC has been awarded 1.1 million in funds to help students affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic. There will be guidelines to determine which students qualify for CAREs funding. International students, DACA/Dreamers, any distance learner in a distance learning program prior to March 27, 2020 are **not** eligible. An application is currently being developed and should be distributed around May 1. A mass email will be sent out to all students directing them to the Financial Aid website, where they will find the application to apply for funding. They are also working on finding resources for students that do not qualify for CAREs. All of the resources will be posted to the Financial Aid website. If students have any particular questions, they can call the Financial Aid office at 806.743.3025 – please leave your name, R number, and a short message. Students can also send an email to: financial.aid@ttuhsc.edu

Questions from attendees:

Are the students required to wear a mask? YES, everyone in the building will be required to wear a mask. Temperature threshold is at 100, anything around that, even slightly below, you might be asked to go home. Masks are worn to prevent spreading the disease to others. Everyone is encouraged to continue social distancing, with the exception of those with whom you already live with. Dr. Cook encouraged being outside in a safe way, to take care of mental and psychological health. People that have entered HSC without masks were turned away as of this morning.

Is the return date for non-research-related faculty tentatively July 6th or earlier? All phases will be decided by deans and the President and therefore return dates are determined by individual program. The July 6th date was selected due to some classes that include anatomy and more complex curriculums that require on-site learning.

Should we plan for online teaching in the fall? Yes, just to be cautious, faculty should plan for an online curriculum. This could also include a hybrid of in-person and online learning can be incorporated.

Tentative date for Amarillo campus re-opening? There is no date right now. Drs. Abbruscato and Smith will determine when it is safe for both students and faculty/staff to return to campus.

Per Dr. Altenberg: for students in the Cell Physiology and Molecular Biophysics department, there is no difference between Phases IV and III, so most students will not be allowed in the labs until we move to Phase II.

As for the funding point of view, is the school planning any request to funding agencies like NIH, AHA and other for fund extensions and/or supplements to account for the research delays caused by the pandemic? Is this something each PI will have to deal on a case by case scenario?

Dr. Kang stated that this has not been discussed, TTUHSC has been in contact with agencies to have them approach political entities to push something through but no updates. We will try to push it because the government donated huge amounts of money to support this. Since we are paying personnel but no work is done, government needs to make up for funds.

I am concerned about the single point of entry as it will inevitably lead to crowding that we wanted to avoid. I thought the online form filled out by individuals every day was working well? Self-attestation forms will need to continue to be filled out. Administration will work with operations to ensure that social distancing rules are followed. Phase III is primarily clinical staff which might not be many people. Phase II is departmental but there is still time to develop a plan for that.

Should the students who are defending this summer tentatively schedule the meetings on zoom or in person? Yes, all Qualifying Exams and Dissertation Defenses should continue to be scheduled via zoom. This might change in the Fall semester, but currently contact the department coordinator and Sophia for assistance.

If viral cases start going up in Phase III or II, what criteria will trigger increasing Phases again? Dr. Byrd stated that if community spread cases increase, we will more than likely go back to Phase IV. The final decision will be up to interim President Rice-Spearman.

It is assumed that Phase III is a transition phase. Is there a determined time window assigned to Phase III before a decision is made to move forward to Phase II, go back to Phase IV, or keep waiting? There's no time period for this. Times are being discussed weekly and on a case by case basis. We are following Public Health leads, pending on if the situation gets better or worse.

Dr. Byrd recommends journaling through this pandemic.