

BELHAVEN UNIVERSITY

O u r S t a n d a r d i s C h r i s t

Friday, May 1, 2020

Dear Students,

You and your families have been in my prayers. I know these past two months have required enormous change, patience, and a new way of looking at the world. I trust God has strengthened your dependence on Him. As our verse of the year reminds us, we are “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” The Lord will keep you strong!

I’ve been so proud of our current BU students and faculty as we successfully shifted all our courses to a virtual format. Finals are underway, and the semester is almost over. Whew! And for those of you who are incoming freshmen for the fall, you’ve especially faced a tough time this spring with your high school academic adjustments, plus missing out on all those great moments of your senior year. I know how disappointed I’ve been for our BU seniors, and I’m looking forward to a great Homecoming on October 30-31 during which we’ll have “Spring” Commencement and celebrate their success in completing degrees.

Looking ahead to the fall semester 2020, I’m thrilled to tell you we are moving full-speed ahead with the expectation the University will safely open with “new normal” in-person teaching and residential life.

Move-in Day for most students will be Friday, August 21st and Monday, August 24th is the first day of classes. We are anticipating a wonderful new class of students. I can’t wait to see you on campus!

As we prepare for the semester our primary focus will be on SAFETY, so we’ll need to make some modifications that protect students, faculty, and staff as we come back together to begin the fall semester. This will require some changes in how we learn and live together, and we’ve also made some significant adjustments in policies to assure we can keep everyone as safe as possible as Covid-19 continues to be with us.

For your planning, I want to detail for you some of the anticipated safety adjustments we’ll be making for the fall. Our understanding of the virus continues to develop, and so what we plan now may be modified as we get closer to August – or may shift as the semester progresses. But if we all work together, we can stay safe and have a great fall semester.

1. We will not have large group meetings. Campus activities, ministry groups, student organizations, various meetings, Arts audiences, and indoor sport fans will be limited in number based on the setting for appropriate social distancing. Chapel will be virtual (and not required).
2. Class sizes will be limited to no more than 15 students in most cases, and we will schedule those classes in rooms that allow proper distancing, not filling more than about half the seats in any classroom. This class size limit will also enable closer connections with your faculty.
3. Through most of the summer, our administration and faculty will be working from home rather than on campus. This will allow our campus operations team to have full access to the campus to clean it from top-to-bottom, getting everything ready for you this fall.

4. This fall we will have in place appropriate standards of social distancing, requiring masks in crowded settings, staggered dining hours, temperature taking, etc.
5. Normally our traditional students are limited to no more than six online courses during their degree, but that limit will be relaxed for the fall semester - including the offering online general core courses and a number of courses in various majors. For flexibility in your schedule, or to minimize your time in groups, you may want to substitute one or two of your in-class courses for a 100% online class format (not virtual with zoom). Your academic planning advisor will share the details.
6. At this time we fully expect to have an exciting fall in athletics. However, to assure the safety of our athletes we will follow the NCAA guidelines. We expect those directives to be released soon. Dance, theatre, and music ensembles will make adjustments to assure adequate precautions.
7. We will have proper precautions in place for those living in the residence halls and have sanitation plans for high traffic areas. We will be holding back some rooms in case a residential student contracts Covid-19 during the semester and needs to be quarantined until family can transport their sick student home to fully recover. Further, we have restructured our housing and food contract so that if Belhaven is forced to close the residential campus in mid-term, you will be refunded for the unused portion of food and housing costs – minus any scholarships that are designated for residential living. Should that happen, all students will be required to leave campus, and the housing/food option would not be continued as it was at Belhaven this spring when universities were forced to abruptly close without time for students to make other plans.
8. We are thankful that the rate of infection in Mississippi has been dramatically lower than many parts of the country. But we all go into the semester understanding that a significant virus outbreak could trigger another Shelter At Home Order and require us to complete the semester in a virtual format. With time to properly plan for that potential change, we have chosen courses for the fall which can be easily converted to a virtual format for continuous, effective learning.

Keeping your education on schedule is our priority, and we have a solid “Plan B” ready to go should there be an outbreak of the virus this summer that keeps universities from offering on-campus learning this fall. We will have a robust curriculum of classes in both online and virtual-zoom formats so that your education is not slowed down by Covid-19. We pray this option won’t be required, but knowing a solid plan is in place should give you confidence that Belhaven is ready to serve you no matter how the summer develops.

I look forward to seeing you in August. It will be the most memorable semester you’ll ever have – and I’m praying the Lord will make it your best semester ever!

Serving Him always,



Roger Parrott

President of the University

P.S. Fairly soon we expect to have all fall course offerings available – including online options. Your academic planning advisor will be in touch with you about choosing your academic schedule for the fall semester. Financial aid needs to talk with you as well, if you don’t already have a plan in place.