

## Letter from the Provost to all Faculty/Instructional Staff

August 25, 2009

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you about the potential for a significant disruption of our teaching this year due to the H1N1 flu virus. You have already heard from Bill Fry, the Dean of the Faculty, and Dr. Janet Corson-Rikert, the Executive Director of the University Health Services, about the general dimensions of the upcoming flu season. In order to mitigate the rapid spread of illness across campus, the university is following the recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the New York State Department of Health and requesting those sick with flu-like illnesses to stay out of circulation during the course of their illness. For most, recovery will take a week or more. All students, faculty and staff were recently informed of this recommendation.

The precise level of flu-related absenteeism is difficult to predict. Currently, the most likely scenario is for a significantly elevated level of illness that strains our normal instructional program but does not warrant a university-wide closure. With that in mind, we recommend the following guidelines:

- Given the possibility of high rates of student absenteeism, faculty should develop robust systems to communicate with ill students about their individual situations and also about the status of the course. Protocols for announcing changes to course schedules, class assignments and the like should be established and articulated before they may become necessary. When appropriate, the electronic posting of assignments, class notes and course materials will help students keep pace with the course during any absence.
- A severe outbreak of flu-related illness will be very stressful and challenging for our students. We therefore urge you to be as flexible as possible and to consider in advance the best means for accommodating unusually high levels of absenteeism. Policies and practices regarding attendance, assignment deadlines, classroom participation, laboratory activities, make-up options, the number of exams, the weighting of grades and the like may need to be modified. Attempting to resolve these issues after the fact is likely to be more difficult and contentious than anticipating and planning ahead for situations that may require extra flexibility.
- Faculty illness also will impact our teaching mission. Please give thought to the feasibility of continuing instruction via electronic means or by having a colleague assist with teaching.
- Individual faculty members should keep their relevant academic leadership informed of any significant problems or issues. There may be some circumstances in which it is necessary or advantageous for the unit as a whole to adopt a consistent approach to a particular problem.
- Please bear in mind that under long standing policy, University Health Services does not issue medical excuses to ill students. The CDC recently affirmed this approach as an important means for mitigating the burden a severe flu season will have on university and local health service providers. Under these circumstances, requiring students to produce a medical excuse will create pressure on sick students to continue attending class, an outcome that is contrary to our collective interest in minimizing the spread of illness through the university population.
- In the event that the pandemic is more severe than currently anticipated, a general suspension of instruction may be necessary. The level of disruption caused by this decision will vary

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considerably depending on when it occurs, how long it lasts, whether there are successive waves of infection, and the like. Planning efforts around this possibility are underway, although the above uncertainties will limit our ability to fully anticipate all contingencies.

The latest information on the H1N1 influenza and the university's response to it can be found at: <http://www.cornell.edu/emergency/flu/081909-message.cfm>. Faculty members also are urged to consult directly with their academic leadership regarding specific concerns and questions.

In sum, planning and flexibility will go a long way in mitigating the impact of this challenging public health situation on our academic mission. I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Warmest regards,

Kent Fuchs  
Provost