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OVERVIEW

The world has gone through significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Adjustments to normal business operations, a renewed focus on cleaning and disinfecting, and the implementation of social distancing have changed how we interact with each other. At ECSU, we are adapting to this new normal and have developed a comprehensive plan aimed at protecting every Viking as they live, work, and learn in our community.

This plan considers health and safety guidelines from state and federal officials and integrates that focus into several key planning areas. All employees are expected to review, understand, and comply with the directives outlined here. This content may be updated as necessary to reflect changing recommendations and policy. Please monitor your email and regularly review our Viking Compass webpage for the most up-to-date information.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 is a severe respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus. It is characterized by cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, and/or at least two of the following symptoms: fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, and/or new loss of taste or smell. It is believed to be spread through close contact with an infected person (through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes). It may also be possible that a person can contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Knowing the facts and how to protect yourself is critical to help avoid infection.

UNDERSTANDING HOW TO MINIMIZE DISEASE SPREAD

CDC – How COVID-19 spreads

CDC – How to protect yourself and others
RETURNING TO WORK

Phased Return. ECSU will be phasing a gradual return of employees to campus while ensuring appropriate social distancing, cleaning, and sanitizing of workplace surfaces, and the availability of personal protective equipment for certain on-campus employees. Supervisors will decide which employees will return to work on campus. Supervisors are encouraged to limit the number of employees in small office spaces to meet distancing requirements. It is expected that many employees will continue working remotely (full-time or intermittently) for the time being.

Supervisors have several strategies to ensure their units are managed effectively and safely for employees who are in the office. These options include, but are not limited to:
• Using technology to limit face-to-face meetings;
• Alternating and staggering employee work schedules;
• Using directional signage and floor markers to manage traffic flow; and
• Reconfiguring workstations and departmental lobbies to create barriers.

The UNC System has provided guidance to supervisors, which outlines strategies as they consider a return to normal operations.

Generally, staff will be among the first to report to campus, beginning in June and through July. Additional employee groups like faculty and those who work in support of teaching, research, and on-campus student support will follow. Please keep in mind that some employees may be asked to continue to work remotely to promote social distancing.
Testing. Presently, we do not plan to test everyone prior to their re-entry to campus. However, the university is currently developing the capability to test individuals on campus, and in the region, when it is recommended by a healthcare professional. Over the summer months, we will be working closely with healthcare professionals to develop robust and convenient COVID-19 test procedures for our broader campus community. Testing will reflect state-of-the-art practices, and results will be used to promote the health of our students, faculty, and staff. Testing will also help us monitor the spread of the virus on campus and in the region. We anticipate advances in testing practices and guidelines and will update the campus as testing evolves.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Employees. The university is procuring face masks for all employees, no matter their job responsibilities. The university also is obtaining the requisite PPE for specific employees whose job requires continuous engagement with community members. The university is procuring face shields, masks, gloves, and other PPE that will give employees the confidence to do their jobs effectively. Supervisors will be provided with the requisite PPE appropriate to fulfill their job requirements.

Workplace Accommodation Support. If employees request an accommodation that is based on medical circumstances, they should use the ADA accommodations process managed by the Office of Human Resources. This process will allow employees who self-identify as being high risk for contracting COVID-19 or for more severe medical issues if COVID-19 is contracted or who are unable to work because of a physical or mental medical condition to seek accommodations. This process is confidential, and your medical information will not be shared with your supervisor. Accommodations could include an altered work schedule, assignment to a remote work schedule, or a changed office location depending on the medical information received.

If there are requests for flexibility for reasons other than medical circumstances (e.g., childcare matters, age, caretaking responsibilities for or cohabitating with a high-risk individual), employees are encouraged to work with their supervisors to identify solutions that balance individual needs with the university as a whole. In addition, the UNC System has provided a brochure for you should you have questions about leave entitlements, return-to-work expectations, and accommodations.
HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS

The following health and safety standards are encouraged to protect each community member:

*Wear a face mask or face covering.* Employees are required to wear face coverings at all times when on the ECSU campus, unless they are alone in their office or personal space. The university will provide re-usable face masks to students, faculty and staff who do not have their own. Community members may wear their own cloth masks or face coverings if that is their preference; personal masks or face coverings should have fabric design or patterns that are appropriate for the classroom and the workplace. Cloth masks or face coverings should be washed daily.

**HOW TO WEAR YOUR FACE MASK**
Protect yourself with healthy habits. Everyone should practice regular hand washing hygiene and other sanitization guidelines advised by the Centers for Disease Control and Protection and state guidance. Always wash your hands after you touch highly touched surfaces (such as doorknobs, elevator buttons and photo copiers) and avoid touching your face, especially after coming into contact with these surfaces. Hand hygiene is especially critical after sneezing or coughing, after using the bathroom, before and after eating, and throughout the day. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60-90% alcohol as hand sanitizers are also effective at preventing the spread of germs. Also, wash your hands before and after handling a face mask or facial covering. Here is an example of proper handwashing techniques: https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html

Practice social distancing. Do your best to ensure at least 6-feet of distance between yourself and others whenever possible. Avoid large group gatherings or crowded spaces to limit community spread.

Maintain clean, safe spaces. Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched items and areas with CDC-approved disinfectants. Cleaning and disinfecting wipes will be provided in each workplace, classroom, and other campus facilities.

Utilize technology and virtual platforms. Community members should limit in-person work meetings, meetings to access student services, student programs and events, and other social gatherings consistent with current health guidelines. Virtual meeting technology should be utilized as much as possible to limit in-person meetings. On-campus space reservations will be limited to those individuals and groups that abide by this guidance. A variety of ECSU-branded formal, informal, and campus scenery university-branded virtual backgrounds bring a Viking look and feel to all your digital learning and virtual meetings.
Self-health monitoring. Before leaving your home for work, employees must check for symptoms daily using the COVID-19 screening offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Employees who are experiencing any symptom(s) indicated on this health screening checklist cannot come to campus.

Symptoms or positive COVID-19 test results. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued guidance that no faculty, staff, or student should come to campus if they become sick with COVID-19 symptoms, test positive for COVID-19, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 symptoms or a confirmed or suspected case. Employees who become sick with COVID-19 symptoms, test positive for COVID-19, or are exposed to someone with COVID-19 symptoms or a confirmed or suspected case should immediately contact their health care provider and remain off-campus. Employees may be required to participate in testing and/or physical separation when recommended or required to do so by a medical provider or public health official. Employees who have symptoms, test positive, or have knowledge of potential exposure to COVID-19 also should notify their immediate supervisor to make work schedule adjustments. Teleworking arrangements must be made with the supervisor or leave must be taken by the employee. Employees also must report any positive COVID-19 test to the Office of Human Resources.
Provide medical return clearance. Employees cannot return to campus until they test negative for Covid-19. Negative test results must be provided to the Office of Human Resources to clear their return.

Participate in contact tracing. Contact tracing will be used to locate individuals who have been identified to have been in close contact with a person who has tested positive for the virus. The purpose of contact tracing is to identify cases, limit the spread of the virus, and provide appropriate care for individuals who have been exposed. When we discover that a member of our community has tested positive for the virus, we will follow standard public health protocols to identify and communicate with those who had close contact with the individual. This tracing will be conducted in concert with Student Health Services and the Pasquotank County Health Department. We are in the process of developing a protocol with guidance from our infectious disease and public health experts as to what happens to a class when a professor or student in that class tests positive. Employees may be required to participate in contact tracing and additional self-monitoring if identified as a potential close contact of a COVID-19 positive individual or if determined to be an asymptomatic COVID-19 positive person.
CLEANING AND DISINFECTING

A clean environment is critical to ensuring we limit the potential for community spread. The university is taking immediate steps to ensure we are prepared for employees’ return.

**Housekeeping.** We are doubling our housekeeping staff to ensure we are constantly cleaning the work, academic, and residence hall environments. These employees will be equipped with PPE and plenty of tools and cleaning chemicals to ensure they can keep our campus sanitized. Their work schedules have been adjusted to better align with building operation hours.

**Campus Cleaning and Disinfecting.** The university has ordered hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes to strategically place in classrooms and business units. We cannot do this alone—employees are encouraged to use these items to sanitize their immediate area and their hands. In addition, restrooms will be stocked with adequate amounts of hand soap and paper towels. Employees are encouraged to use soap and water to wash their hands as often as possible.

**Cleaning Strategy.** While traditional housekeeping functions will be performed, an intense focus will be on high touch areas and common spaces. This includes, but is not limited to classrooms, computer labs, sitting and lobby areas, and other frequently used, high touch areas. Housekeepers will continuously clean areas multiple times a day.

If employees identify an area that needs immediate attention, they should contact their building coordinator to report the sanitation issue[s].
SOCIAL DISTANCING

Social distancing is important for everyone! To help protect the Viking Community, employees should avoid close contact (maintain distancing of at least 6 feet) with other individuals, handshaking, or gatherings of more than 10 people whenever possible.

**Individual Workspaces.** If employees work in an office, no more than one person should be in the same room unless the required 6 feet of distancing can be consistently maintained. If more than one person is in a room, masks/face coverings should be worn at all times. A mask or face covering is not required if an employee is working alone in a confined office space (does not include partitioned work areas in a large open environment).

**Open Workspaces.** If employees work in an open environment, be sure to maintain at least 6 feet distance from co-workers. It is recommended they wear a face mask or face covering while in a shared workspace/room. Departments should assess open work environments and meeting rooms to institute measures to physically separate and increase distance between employees, other co-workers and customers. These could include visual cues on floors and directional signage for large open workspaces with multiple through-ways to increase distance between employees.

**Meetings/Conference Rooms.** Convening in groups increases the risk of viral transmission. Where feasible, meetings should be held in whole or part using virtual conferencing services like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, telephone, etc. In-person meetings are limited to the restrictions of local, state and federal orders and should not exceed 50% of a room’s capacity, assuming individuals can still maintain 6 feet of separation for social distancing requirements.
Restrooms. Use of restrooms should be limited based on size to ensure at least 6 feet distance between individuals. Employees should wash their hands thoroughly afterward to reduce the potential transmission of the virus.

Elevators and Stairwells. The maximum occupancy for elevators will be two individuals. Employees are encouraged to wear face masks or face coverings and avoid touching the elevator buttons with their exposed hand/fingers, if possible. Wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers with greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol as the preferred form of hand hygiene in healthcare settings upon departing the elevator. When using the stairs, please be courteous and respectful of others in front, behind or passing in the opposite direction. Offer the appropriate 6 feet distance between individuals on stairwells.

Campus Dining. Dining services will be provided to members of the campus community; however, the experience will be different to adhere to guidance from public health professionals. The following protocols will be implemented this year to keep individuals safe:

- All self-serve stations will be eliminated.
- Disposable cutlery and plates will be utilized.
- There will be limited dining room seating.
- Dining associates will serve at food stations.
- Hand sanitizer will be available throughout dining areas.
- Lines at food entrances and food stations will be measured off for 6-foot distance separations and staff will actively monitor lines for compliance.
- Restrooms will be cleaned more regularly.
- Plexiglass barriers will be installed at cashier stations.

Enter/Exit Buildings. When entering or exiting buildings, please be courteous and respectful of others in front, behind or passing in the opposite direction. Step to the side to offer the appropriate 6 feet distance between individuals. Where appropriate, signage will be displayed throughout campus providing guidance, including entering and exiting buildings and elevators.

It is important to note that food options should not be negatively impacted. Individuals should expect that the variety of food options they have always experienced will remain unchanged.
MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Managing COVID-19 and adapting to significant changes in the work environment can be a stressful experience for everyone and may evoke emotions that are unfamiliar or difficult to work through. The EAP is an employer-sponsored benefit program that offers support and resources to address personal or work-related challenges and concerns. Best of all, it is free for employees and members of their household and is completely confidential. Learn more about the EAP and how to contact them on the UNC System HR website.

STAY UP TO DATE

This content may be updated as necessary to reflect changing recommendations and policy. Monitor your email and regularly visit the employee section of ECSU’s Viking Compass webpage for the most up-to-date information.