Dear Faculty Member:

This is an update on three important topics related to the University’s plan to protect the health of students, faculty, and other employees during the upcoming fall term: class attendance policies, the excused absence process, and contact tracing protocols.

Class Attendance Policies:

COVID-19 presents significant challenges as we move into the fall semester. As we continue to develop and implement a plan that will allow for on-campus operations while also protecting our students, faculty, and staff, we are all called upon to make adjustments to our standard practices in many areas. One of these areas has to do with class attendance policies, particularly as those policies apply to attending classes in person on campus.

Attendance policies that do not allow for excused absences or that limit those absences could incentivize students who have COVID-19 or have been exposed to COVID-19 to attend class, which of course would place all of us at increased risk of exposure to the virus. Accordingly, I ask each of you to adopt policies that do not penalize students who miss face to face class sessions this fall.

Excused Absence Process for Fall 2020, including for those students who test positive for COVID-19 or who must self-quarantine due to exposure:

Please note that for the fall 2020 semester, students who are verified as having an illness or a need to self-quarantine because of symptoms or exposure can request an excused absence. These requests will be routed through the Dean of Students and faculty will receive a letter by email notifying them of the excused absence, although, to protect the student’s confidentiality, the details of the illness or exposure will not be provided. As the length of time will differ based on individual circumstances, a follow-up letter will be sent by the Dean of Students to the faculty member at the end of the excused period (i.e., after the appropriate self-quarantine period ends).

Please work remotely with these students to accommodate excused absences. For those students who are too ill to participate or miss assignments that cannot be done remotely, faculty should allow make up of missed work. We do recognize that, depending on the timing and length of the absence, completing course requirements during the semester may be difficult or impossible. In those cases, we encourage faculty to counsel students about options such as incompletes or course withdrawals.

Contact Tracing Processes and Notification of Persons Exposed to COVID-19:

Students who test positive for COVID-19, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 should immediately notify USA Contact Tracing (reportcovid@southalabama.edu). USA Contact Tracing will notify the Dean of
Students for students who must miss class because of self-quarantine and the same letter of notification will be sent to the appropriate members of the faculty.

If a student reports to the faculty member that he or she has tested positive for the virus, or if they report symptoms that are consistent with a COVID-19 infection, the faculty member should also report information about the student to USA Contact Tracing (reportcovid@southalabama.edu).

If faculty or other students are determined to have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, USA Contact Tracing will contact them directly with guidance in a separate process that will also protect the individual’s confidentiality (see: https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/financialaffairs/hr/contact-tracing.html for details of the Contact Tracing process). Faculty should not inform students or others of possible exposures; instead, please rely on Contact Tracing to make those contacts.

Thank you once again for all of the work you are doing as we prepare for the Fall semester. We recognize that this is a developing situation with challenges we must navigate together. We will continue to keep you updated about policies and plans. Remember to visit the Academic Affairs COVID-19 Communications website (https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/academicaffairs/communications.html) and the Reopening Plan website (https://www.southalabama.edu/reopening/) for policies and past communications.