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SMC opts for mainly remote fall instruction

By Vera Kochan

Unlike the California State University system which announced a predominantly remote instruction format in May or the University of California system in which announcements were each made independently of each other and primarily in July, Moraga's Saint Mary's College made an official announcement to its students on Aug. 3.

SMC had high hopes back in May that it would be able to conduct in-person courses in the fall. Unlike much larger college campuses, trimming class sizes and reducing the number of occupants in on-campus housing facilities was a distinct and not impossible scenario. However, the resurgence of positive coronavirus cases globally dashed any hopes for a semblance of normalcy and business as usual.

Like many campuses across the country SMC faculty, staff and a COVID-19 Response Group monitored the pandemic situation. According to a statement from SMC President James Donahue, "We have developed robust health and safety protocols including screening, testing, and contact tracing capabilities; redesigned classrooms and campus spaces to take advantage of our unique natural and built environment; adopted intensive cleaning and sanitizing procedures; and developed plans to offer our fall classes in a mix of instructional modes, including in-person, hybrid and online."

On-campus student housing has seen its capacity cut by half to help enforce social distancing. Every resident will have their own bedroom with priority assignment of the 868 single-occupancy rooms provided to first-year students, High Potential Program students, international students, Pell-eligible students, students requiring on-campus disability accommodations, students requiring on-campus courses with no remote options, and students who are experiencing housing insecurity and/or technology constraints. The entire fall semester of courses will be conducted remotely with the exception of some in-person and hybrid classes for undergraduates living on campus doing research and lab work. Studio, performance-based and seminar courses will also fall into the exception category.

"We will be making use of newly-developed outdoor classroom spaces and non-traditional classrooms to the extent feasible for those classes," stated Donahue, adding, "and will identify on-campus spaces for residential students to study and participate in remote courses."

Faculty, staff and students will be expected to wear a mask, maintain a 6-foot distance and follow other safety protocols as directed by SMC. The college is in the process of developing a policy for any visitors and guests wanting to visit the campus. The new fall term is scheduled to begin Aug. 31.

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