

Letter to Students From The Provost

March 22, 2020

Tomorrow morning, for the first time in the 175-year history of the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, classes will be meeting and classrooms will be empty. Students will learn – many far from Belton, and grades will be earned even though faculty and students are separated by miles. This semester is different, but in some respects the Spring 2020 semester will be the same as every previous Spring in our history. Students will study. Students will learn. Students will graduate in May.

Two reminders for tomorrow:

- UMHB will shift all classes to an online learning format beginning tomorrow, with tentative plans to return to campus and resume face-to-face classes on Monday, April 6, if conditions allow. Students should frequently check myCourses and their UMHB email for communications from their professors.
- For UMHB students who live locally and do not have computer access at home, Townsend Memorial Library will offer computer access. The computer lab in the library will be accessible Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Students who reside outside the local area and do not have access to a computer or the Internet should call the Center for Academic Excellence at (254) 295-4475.

The COVID-19 event is a shared experience that none of us chose. This experience is new to us, but not new to our beloved school. Dr. J. M Frazier, founding chair of the Biology department and the namesake of the Frazier building next to Hardy Hall, served as the campus doctor for decades in the early 1900s. In his autobiography, he describes how just over 100 years ago, in 1919, he had to quarantine 450 Mary Hardin-Baylor students and faculty because of the Spanish flu. That was over half the student body. Remarkably, the school stayed open, and the students continued to study and earn academic credit. Our school had a challenging semester, but the

students, faculty, and staff persevered. The school not only has survived, but has thrived in the 100 years since. Our history reminds us that together, with the Lord's help, we will also overcome these current events.

When I arrived on campus three years ago, I shared in my first email to faculty what attracted me to UMHB. I wrote that "the most exciting reason I wanted to be here was the clear commitment for UMHB to be an innovative, Christ-centered university." As we start classes again tomorrow, be mindful of both of these descriptions.

We are innovative. UMHB has invested heavily in online teaching for the last several years. We have not just prepared for this moment for a week, but for a decade. We have held countless training sessions, hired outstanding instructional designers for our classes, made significant investments in IT infrastructure, and hired faculty who are passionate about teaching in all formats. Our faculty are ready to deliver a strong, quality education, no matter the delivery method.

We are Christ-centered. I have been in awe of the strong faith of our faculty and their desire for students to see the world through the lens of Christian faith. UMHB faculty will continue to support you well through this unusual semester and beyond. Students, let me say this clearly: You have faculty who love you and are deeply committed to your academic success. They will walk through this with you.

In closing, I am reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah to God's people in Isaiah 43:2-3:

When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

Isaiah reminds us of a powerful truth: none of us are promised a lifetime of easy circumstances, but we are promised God's presence as we go through these challenging days together.

Tomorrow begins a new and a great chapter in the story of UMHB. I cannot wait to see what God will do in your lives throughout the remainder of this semester.

If you have any questions, concerns, coronavirus memes, or funny gifs, please email me or let me know on twitter @UMHBProvost

Stay safe. Study hard. Go Cru!

Dr. John Vassar, Provost & Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs