April 27, 2020

Dear Prospective Students and Families:

Colorado has transitioned from the ‘Stay at Home’ pandemic response to a ‘Safer at Home’ prevention era. While universities are not yet reopened, this step symbolizes a new trajectory forward and the gradual reopening of Colorado and Colorado Mesa University.

We have been working for weeks to design our path forward and that work continues. Like every spring and summer, we invest heavily in major initiatives and campus updates to welcome students back in August. This year, those initiatives focus on facing today’s challenges with purpose, mission and clarity. College is about learning, changing and moving forward in a better way. CMU is designing that better way by creating a campus that will exist in a world permanently changed; but one that needs higher education more than ever.

Ironically, COVID-19 has reinforced the value of knowledge and learning. Humanity’s unprecedented global response to the pandemic is predicated on society’s prior investments in higher education. This investment dates back centuries, and is what prepared today’s nurses, emergency medical technicians, doctors, engineers, agricultural specialists, researchers, electric lineworkers and countless others who are leading the response effort.

The engineering miracle of keeping the lights on during the pandemic wasn’t developed yesterday. The marvel began with a person who not only discovered modern use of electricity, but also helped shape modern universities in the United States today. Benjamin Franklin’s legacy is alive and well in our electric lineman and engineering programs and is one example of many where the continuum of education is carried on by CMU.

When considering your plans for the future, there are many reasons to feel optimistic about securing your room, investing in tuition and looking forward to your education this fall.

We also must earn your trust and confidence in our ability to safeguard the investment you’re making in your future through attending CMU.

In addition to guaranteeing refunds if necessary, CMU sits in Mesa County — a community with likely the lowest per capita metropolitan infection rates of COVID-19 in Colorado to date. The area has not seen an exponential spike in cases and the local infection curve remains flat. For this reason, CMU is well positioned to be successful as Colorado embarks on reopening. The community is also fortunate because the lack of exponential growth in cases has given local healthcare providers time to prepare for a future response if needed.

On campus, CMU is actively exploring a process for onsite testing with fast turnaround times. We are developing social distancing protocols for campus housing, dining services and classrooms. We are working with health officials to incorporate distancing measures for socializing and campus events. We are working to establish an inventory of personal protective supplies for students, faculty and staff to use in conjunction with expert guidance.

We are not waiting to work these details out — we are addressing them now. We are planning today so CMU can make a strong case for reopening as soon as the data and research demonstrates doing so is prudent and possible.
It is inevitable that members of the CMU community will continue to contract the virus. In preparation for this reality, CMU will continue working with specialists in the Student Wellness Center who are designated to COVID-19 prevention and response. We are working with county health officials to utilize existing contact tracing plans that will work to quickly isolate confirmed cases and limit spread.

Critically important are the close relationships between Colorado Mesa University and local hospitals.

The CEOs of the area’s two largest hospital facilities are on a first-name basis with me and other campus leaders. CMU healthcare programs are deeply integrated into local hospital operations and operations of the Student Wellness Center clinic are managed by a local hospital.

During the last month, CMU has issued housing refunds to our current students and has also issued a new COVID-19 course withdrawal period. This period allows students to withdraw from classes with a full refund so that they can step back and have a fresh start next semester. We also implemented an emergency “pass/fail” grading option for this semester knowing that students’ GPAs should not take a hit with the adjustment to online learning. The bottom line: moving forward we will honor your investment in higher education and will always do right financially by our students and their families.

Know that CMU has a formal COVID-19 University Task Force that will communicate details of the plans I outlined above, and is quick to adapt as conditions change.

Above all, I encourage you to press on, invest in yourself and do not allow your self-betterment to be short-circuited by a virus. And do not forget that history reveals humanity’s greatest weapon against challenge is education.

If you are a parent, know your investment in your student’s future is just as important now as it ever was. If you are a student, maintain your determination and confidence. Every worker and professional engaged in the world’s pandemic response has at least one thing in common: the methods they deploy, the products they use and the information they wield is born of higher education, and are born in you.

Sincerely,

Tim Foster
President
Colorado Mesa University