Chancellors Update #5

May 28, 2020

Dear NCTC Community,

Now that the Spring semester has concluded, our minds turn toward the future. While we find ourselves in extraordinary times, I have found strength in your continued resilience in the face of this pandemic. Rest assured that we care about the well-being of our staff, faculty, students, and community and want to keep you updated as the college responds to this ongoing situation.

In our most recent COVID-19 update, we announced that May Minimester, Summer I, Summer II, and Summer III courses would be offered entirely online, and that all college personnel would continue to work remotely through at least May 31st. In addition, NCTC student housing is closed for the summer and all external meetings and events have been canceled.

In light of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott’s recent executive orders re-opening parts of the Texas economy, NCTC will begin a phased return to campus staffing on Monday, June 15th. As we resume on-campus operations, our top priority is to protect the safety and health of NCTC’s faculty, staff, and students. With that goal in mind, we have taken a variety of steps to make our campuses safe and outlined a flexible, multi-phase return to campus designed to meet NCTC’s operational needs while protecting our campus communities and remaining responsive to the needs of our employees.

It is clear that the Fall 2020 semester will be very different from previous semesters. As public health information concerning COVID-19 evolves, it is likely we will need to adjust our guidance. The following is a general framework based on input from NCTC personnel, public health officials, and evidence-based public health protocols regarding the control of infectious disease.

Health and Safety Guidance

When the College returns to campus operations, employees and students will notice a variety of changes designed to create a safe and healthy environment.

Social Distancing: Maintaining space from others is one of the most effective tools in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Public health officials recommend that individuals remain at least six feet apart at all times, do not gather in groups, and avoid mass gatherings. To support this effort, NCTC will continue to encourage virtual meetings and will restrict face-to-face meetings. Maintenance will remove or rearrange chairs and tables or add visual cue marks in meeting rooms to support social distancing practices between attendees.

Advanced Cleaning Protocols: NCTC has collaborated with its custodial vendors to conduct advanced cleaning protocols in accordance with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, and custodial services will conduct additional cleanings.

In addition to these disinfection procedures, additional care should be taken to wipe down commonly used surfaces. NCTC encourages all employees to wipe down their work areas with EPA-registered 60% alcohol solution before starting work and before leaving any room in which they have been working. NCTC is ordering additional cleaning supplies that will be provided for NCTC purpose.

Plexiglass Dividers: A number of NCTC workstations are designed to provide customer service to the public. To protect these employees and campus visitors, the college is installing plexiglass dividers to maintain physical separation and will install additional dividers this summer.
Face Masks/Face Coverings: We strongly encourage all employees working on campus to wear face masks or face coverings when in the presence of others. Appropriate use of face masks or coverings is essential to minimizing risks to others near you, though it is not a substitute for social distancing. NCTC anticipates that most employees will bring their own masks for use during work hours. However, to facilitate the use of protective masks on campus, the college has obtained a limited supply of masks and will provide masks for employees, if needed. Departments that traditionally have been provided those items, such as police, food services, and health sciences, will continue to receive those materials through the normal budgetary process.

Please note the following recommendations for proper use and care of face masks and coverings:

- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer prior to handling the face mask/cover.
- Ensure the face mask/cover fits over the nose and under the chin.
- Avoid touching the front of the face mask/cover.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth when removing the face mask/cover and wash your hands immediately after removing.
- Cloth face coverings may not be used more than one day at a time and must be washed after use. Cloth face coverings should be properly laundered with regular clothing detergent before first use and after each shift. Cloth face coverings should be replaced immediately if soiled, damaged, or contaminated.
- Disposable masks should not be used for more than one day and should be placed in the trash immediately if soiled, damaged, or contaminated.

Hand Sanitizer Stations: NCTC will install additional hand sanitizer stations in the common areas of every campus facility for use by employees and students. Disinfectant wipes will be available for use by instructors and students for wiping down instructional spaces as needed.

Restrooms: Occupancy of restrooms will be limited based on facility size to ensure at least 6 feet of social distancing between individuals, and signage will be posted to indicate the appropriate capacity. Restrooms will be cleaned at least every two hours during the day and will undergo a detailed cleaning each evening. Please wash your hands thoroughly after using the restroom.

Elevators: Campus elevators will be limited to two individuals at a time. When using the elevator, please wear your mask or face covering and avoid touching the elevator buttons with your exposed hand/fingers, if possible. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol upon departing the elevator.

Travel: To safeguard our campus communities, travel will be restricted between campuses, NCTC will continue to limit official travel to that deemed essential by the appropriate vice chancellor. (No college vehicles will be available).

Use of Facilities: NCTC facilities will not host events for external organizations this summer. This includes meetings, banquets, luncheons, speeches, performances, and other gatherings. NCTC will not host summer camps, campus tours, or recruiting visits on any of its campuses. Further, we anticipate such events also will be limited during the Fall semester and all business meetings will be conducted in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Phased Return to Campus Operations

NCTC plans to resume in-person campus operations in three distinct phases this summer. In each phase, the college will work with local health officials to monitor and ensure that the risk of contagion is managed effectively before proceeding to the next phase. In advance of Phase 1, select NCTC personnel have returned to campus in anticipation of the safe return of college employees.
Phase 1 (tentatively scheduled to begin Monday, June 15th): Phase 1 will focus on the return of select key personnel needed to initiate essential functions related to resuming in-person work. In this initial phase, NCTC personnel will be allowed to return to on-site work, either because they can most effectively do their jobs on site or because their presence is required on site for management purposes. During this phase, all in-person campus services also will continue to be offered remotely. Employees selected to return to on-campus operations during this phase will be notified no later than Monday, June 1st.

Phase 2 (tentatively scheduled to begin Monday, July 20th): Pending the successful implementation of Phase 1, NCTC will return additional employees to on-site work at a level not to exceed half of full-time employees in a given area. This phase will include additional employees who can begin to offer limited on-campus services made available by appointment only. These services will be identified based upon the advice of public health officials, the college’s business needs, and the input of individual departments. Employees selected to return to on-campus operations during this phase will be notified no later than Monday, July 6th.

Phase 3 (tentatively scheduled to begin Monday, August 17th): Pending the successful implementation of Phase 2, NCTC anticipates returning additional employees to campus operations during this phase to provide an expanded selection of on-campus services. The expansion of these campus services will be identified based upon the advice of public health officials, the college’s business needs, and the input of individual departments. Those personnel previously approved for remote work assignments will remain off-site until the college receives further guidance from public health authorities. Employees selected to return to on-campus operations during this phase will be notified no later than Monday, August 3rd.

In the earliest phases of NCTC’s return to campus operations, no employee will be required to work on site if they have valid health concerns.

During the summer, on-campus operations will be limited to the hours between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. to allow cleaning crews to conduct advanced cleaning protocols each afternoon and evening. NCTC will also remained closed on Fridays during the summer.

Fall Semester

The Fall semester represents a chance for a fresh start to a new academic year. As we continue to overcome this challenge together, we must adapt our operations in light of these current circumstances.

In recognition of the unique challenges ahead in the upcoming Fall semester, College leadership will implement the following strategies:

Self-Certification: NCTC will adopt a new interim regulation for the Fall 2020 semester that requires employees and students, prior to returning in August, to self-certify that within the last 14 days they have not been COVID positive, do not have COVID symptoms, and have not been in the presence of anyone known to be COVID positive.

If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” that individual will be required to notify NCTC, self-isolate for 14 days, and return to campus only if symptom-free at the end of that period. No employees will be allowed to return to work until they have self-certified, and employees will be required to self-certify on a weekly basis.

Testing Positive for COVID-19: As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, NCTC has plans in place in the event an NCTC employee or student tests positive for the virus. Those testing positive for the COVID-19 virus will receive appropriate treatment and place themselves in self-isolation as dictated by evidence-based public health protocols for the control of infectious disease. This will be
conducted in conjunction with local medical and public health professionals, and where possible, those testing for COVID-19 will complete their self-isolation at their permanent residence.

Residence hall students who test positive for COVID-19 who are unable to relocate to their permanent residence will be moved to a separate facility the college has established specifically designated for self-isolation. Students requiring medical care will be treated, as appropriate, by medical professionals.

Students who test positive for COVID-19 may return to NCTC classes and activities after testing negative and after their return has been cleared by their health care provider or in accordance with the most recent local public health and medical guidance.

Faculty and staff who test positive for COVID-19 will be required to work remotely or take sick leave or other appropriate leave, in accordance with NCTC policies and regulations. These individuals will place themselves in self-isolation as determined by local health officials at the time of testing, returning to NCTC only after testing negative and being cleared to return by their health care provider or in accordance with the most recent local public health and medical guidance.

**Face Coverings:** NCTC will continue to strongly encourage all employees and students to utilize face coverings during the Fall 2020 semester. Some specific departments and positions, such as Food Services and Health Sciences, may be required to utilize face coverings.

**Instructional:** Throughout this pandemic, we continue to keep the safety of the entire NCTC community at the forefront. The challenges associated with COVID-19 necessitate changes to the structure of the Fall 2020 academic programs.

NCTC will offer face-to-face, blended, and fully online courses this fall, with a concentration in blended and fully online courses. All classes with a face-to-face component will be enhanced virtually with online instruction conducted synchronously. To control on-campus presence and classroom density, students registered for face-to-face and blended classes will rotate between those modalities, allowing all students in the class to experience both face-to-face and remote instruction.

Final exams in all courses – regardless of modality – will take place remotely, with the exception of Career and Technical Education and Health Sciences courses and those students who have obtained accommodations through Disability Services.

To accommodate social distancing requirements, course caps will be lowered to ensure that six-foot social distancing guidelines are met and that classrooms will host no more than one person per 36 square feet and meet any local and state guidelines. Additionally, the college will offer an expanded selection of Saturday courses to help meet student course needs while limiting course capacities.

Tuition and district-wide fees for the 2020-21 academic year have been posted. At the College’s discretion, and to provide the safest environment for faculty, staff, and students, some or all instruction for the 2020-21 academic year may be delivered remotely. Tuition and mandatory fees have been set regardless of the method of instruction and will not be prorated or refunded in the event instruction occurs remotely for any part of the academic year.

**Housing:** The Gainesville Campus will offer student housing to athletes during the Fall 2020 semester. As with other locations on campus, advanced cleaning protocols and social distancing guidelines will be in effect. Common seating and gathering locations within the residence halls will be closed and occupancy limitations will be in place in common restrooms and laundry room spaces. Outdoor seating will be open but social distancing guidelines will apply.

Prior to move-in, students will undergo a screening process that includes a temperature check. Further, routine temperature checks will continue to occur throughout the fall semester.
**Food Services**: NCTC will offer Food Services during the Fall 2020 semester. Plexiglass will be installed in appropriate locations and the floors will be marked to encourage social distancing in lines. All Food Services employees will wear facemasks and gloves.

In addition to serving meals for consumption in the dining spaces, the college will provide meals to go. Dining area seating will be arranged to encourage social distancing and all dining spaces will undergo frequent cleanings.

**Athletics**: NCTC currently anticipates having athletics in the fall and we continue to formulate our plans for how these programs will be structured. The NJCAA, the two-year college intercollegiate sports governing body, will announce its plans for Fall 2020 sports in mid-June. After that takes place, NCTC will finalize plans regarding its Fall athletic programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a very fluid situation. In these unprecedented times, you may have many questions. Our planning continues to evolve, and as we gather and adapt to new information, I am committed to updating you every step of the way. NCTC’s success always has relied on our ability to work as a team. We are in this together and will come out of this even stronger.

A special thank you to our other 49 community colleges in the state that have worked together to promote a common response to COVID-19. This plan mirrors many others in the state to bring about continuity for our 750,000 community college students in the State of Texas.

Sincerely,

**G. Brent Wallace, Ph.D.**
*Chancellor*
North Central Texas Community College District