

A Robust Return to Campus

Full Return to Campus by Staff notice on February 26, 2021

Submitted by the Executive Committee of the Staff Council of John Carroll University

Submitted to our Senior Leadership Liaison and the Human Resources Department

Understanding the Rationale and Acknowledgement of Need:

Through the communications provided by the Senior Leadership Team, the Human Resources Department and the detailed information regarding preparatory work of the COVID19 Task Force it is clear that the University may not have achieved the robust campus experience that it hoped to realize by reopening the campus for in-person student experiences this Spring. So far it has been communicated that “Relationships, service, and personal interactions are among the many hallmarks of the John Carroll University experience. Right now, our students and other members of the campus community are feeling the loss of the supportive presence we offer to one another.” The communication on February 26 suggested that the call for a *Full Return to Campus by Staff* is in response to feedback from Staff currently working on-campus and students/families that the desired on-campus presence of Staff has been lacking. In addition, it was stated that at this time it is believed that campus is safe for the full return of the Staff community based on feedback from the same on-campus Staff as well as “our observation of daily compliance with our health and safety protocols”.

The Executive Committee acknowledges that a more robust campus presence by Staff is desired to address:

- A sense of inequity between Staff on-campus and Staff currently remote.
- A perception that offices/departments may not be as accessible to on-campus Students (residential, commuter, or in the local community).
- A need to fulfill expectations of Staff presence across the University.

We acknowledge that all Staff have a desire to return to the on-campus community in a way that is safe to support our students, faculty, fellow staff members, and other JCU community members, over time. We hope to offer areas for consideration to help create a robust on-campus presence of Staff and to help alleviate the concerns of those transitioning back to campus. It is likely that some or many of these areas have already been under consideration by our liaisons and we may be restating shared thoughts.

Feedback after the February 26 Communications:

As always, in the advocacy role of Staff Council, the Executive Committee wishes to share the feedback that has been sent to us from members of the Staff Community. The Staff Council Executive Committee has received unsolicited feedback from Staff since the communications to supervisors and subsequently to the full Staff Community were sent on February 26. The feedback has largely focused on the following areas:

- Differences in messaging and communication between divisions/departments/offices regarding expectations of having an on-campus presence prior to this most recent communication.
- Questions seeking more detailed rationale for the full return of Staff to campus.
- Staff identifying guidelines at the state/federal/international level regarding continuing remote work where possible.
- Inquiring how safety protocols in place on-campus currently are scalable for the return of the full Staff Community.
- Specific concerns over offices that need additional preparations to reach physical distancing and other mitigation goals if all team members were to be in person at the same time/location.
- Concerns over the privacy of Staff members as a result of the accommodation process.
- Significant concern with the timing of the return to campus coinciding with the expected potential travel of students over Easter Break, combined with the increase of Staff on-campus; the

concern is that these factors together would increase the likelihood of overall exposure and cases.

- Perceptions of Staff having a requirement separate from Faculty for in-person presence on-campus.
- Additional stressors/anxiety on those who will participate in the accommodation process who were not required to previously under their divisional expectations up until the Feb. 26th communication.
- Staff struggling with the nature of how the communication was distributed.

A Robust On-Campus Staff Presence:

In our role as a consultative body, our goal is to offer constructive areas to our liaisons for their consideration and reflection. Some of these are areas to consider and some are questions we pose for future consideration. We offer the following to the Human Resources Department and to the Senior Leadership Team via our Liaison in the hope that it will help Staff in this transition:

- As Staff return to campus, we would hope that the registration process would reopen for access to surveillance testing. Now that additional Staff will be returning to work on-site, some may be interested in joining this program and participating in it.
- Guidance could be provided on who to contact for Staff concerned about their physical work space, if it may need to be updated or addressed to meet physical distancing requirements/HVAC improvements/proper signage/plexiglass dividers/etc.
- It may help ease concerns of Staff to offer any updates to the Staff Community on anticipated guidance surrounding vaccines.
- We would offer that it would help address the concerns of those seeking accommodations to provide support on navigating how to remain engaged and included with their on-campus colleagues or being left out of in-person meetings within departments/offices. How can we support those who remain virtual from feeling “outed” or “different” when they log in from a visible off-campus location? How can we support them/guide them to respond when they receive in-person meeting requests?
- In the Full Return to Campus by Staff notice on February 26, 2021, the email states how “some one-on-one services and group meetings will be conducted via Zoom...from an on-campus work space.” It would be helpful for Staff to further detail the expectation regarding if most meetings should occur over Zoom or to what degree in-person meetings in meeting rooms should be expected. Additional guidance regarding indoor meeting spaces especially considering ventilation practices/understandings would be appreciated. We recognize that serious and herculean efforts have been made on-campus to create safety protocols and mitigation efforts but our hope would be that guidance for Staff uncomfortable with a given in-person meeting space could be given.
- As *all Staff* prepare for a return to campus on March 29/April 12, it could be beneficial to offer a slower return where possible that focuses on the target areas of concern, as well as expanding the knowledge of the accommodations process:
 - The Human Resources Department or other appropriate accountability avenues could review divisional plans for office/department expectations to meet the previous goal “that all departments must have an in-person presence on campus during the work week so that we are available for our students and can provide real-time responses to their needs.”
 - Where applicable, the priority could be placed on areas of the University that are primarily student-facing to have a robust “in-person presence on campus” and that those offices largely outward facing, or non-germain to the on-campus experience of our students/community members, be given a later date to return to campus to help continue a reduction in overall on-campus employee totals.

- Offices could be given the option to have some level of rotational coverage (where possible) to help reduce bottlenecks in small physical spaces; to create a more staggered presence limiting possible exposures; and to still provide the expected level of on-campus presence .
- Where needed the Human Resources Department could reoffer training opportunities for supervisors or department leaders on how to navigate the expectations of having an in-person presence, the availability of the telecommute policy, the possibility of the flexible work schedule policy, and the applicability of the accommodation process. In addition, it would be beneficial to reoffer sessions also available to Staff to further explain all relevant parts of the previously mentioned processes.

Statement Recognizing the Incredible Work of Staff:

These areas for consideration and reflection are intended to help foster a robust campus presence while simultaneously supporting the work of the University to keep everyone safe. We must acknowledge here that a large section of the Staff Community has been working tirelessly on-campus, some since last March. We are grateful for their work and acknowledge that there are privileges in certain roles that allow some to have the flexibility of remote work in this environment while others must be present. We also want to recognize that staff members who have worked remotely in any capacity continue to devote their full attention to their job responsibilities. Lastly, it must be acknowledged that the University has provided continued guidance through the leadership of so many and especially the COVID19 Taskforce.

In Gratitude for Consideration:

As previously stated, our goal is to share the information we have received unsolicited from Staff with our liaisons. In addition, with gratitude, we are open to any responses to the areas of consideration and questions offered.

Staff Council Executive Committee, March 2021

cc: Resolutions and Position Statements