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FROM THE SEMINARIES: NOBTS, Gateway move to decrease number of employees on campus while under shelter-in-place orders; Southwestern cancels spring events

by SBC Seminary Staff, posted Friday, March 20, 2020 (one month ago)

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story was updated after publication to include the section of information from NOBTS.

Only "essential" employees allowed on NOBTS campus due to New Orleans' stay-home order

By Staff

NEW ORLEANS -- After a directive by New Orleans mayor LaToya Cantrell that residents stay at home in an attempt to quench the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) and Leavell College moved Friday (March 20) to close its campus to all but "an essential function task force of employees until further notice."



Cantrell issued the directive effective Friday evening. The directive would allow residents out of their homes to go to grocery stores, pharmacies and takeout restaurants, as well as health-care facilities. Residents would also be allowed to pursue outdoor recreational activities like running, walking and bicycling, though not in large groups.

"We urge all faculty, staff, and students to abide by our Mayor's guidelines and directives," NOBTS said in a statement announcing the campus closure. "We will keep you informed of any changes as they come."

At time of publication March 20, the Louisiana Department of Health had reported 537 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Louisiana and 14 deaths. According to news reports, most of the confirmed cases and deaths were in the New Orleans area, including five deaths at a New Orleans senior assisted living facility.

NOBTS had already moved to online classes, reduced office hours for most employees and encouraged them to work from home. Friday the school directed the majority of its full-time employees "not to report to their campus office or the campus office in general." Most part-time employees will not work "unless otherwise instructed by their supervisor."

Employees who might continue to work on campus include the president's cabinet, IT staff, campus police and reduced staffs from the business affairs, registrar, financial aid and student life offices, as well as the library.

Gateway remains operational under California's stay-home order

By Staff

ONTARIO, Calif. -- On Thursday, Gov. Gavin Newsome ordered California residents to stay at home indefinitely in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Educational institutions facilitating distance learning, like Gateway, are allowed to remain operational during this time.

"After the safety of our employees and students, our first priority is maintaining the delivery of our educational program," Gateway President Jeff Iorg said. "We are prepared to pursue our mission while accommodating Gov. Newsome's order."

A limited number of employees in technology support, student services, finance and security roles are working at Gateway's two campuses in California. Many other employees are continuing to work from home.

"Any change presents difficulties, but we expect to carry on our day-to-day processes," Iorg said.

Gateway's new campuses in Ontario, Calif., and Fremont, Calif., were designed to incorporate innovative educational technology. These tools have allowed faculty to deliver class content exclusively through synchronous video lectures and online platforms with virtually no disruption. "During our relocation efforts a few years ago, we reinvented our course delivery methodologies," Iorg said.

"Extensive training and the integration of technology in our classrooms prepared our faculty to respond quickly and effectively in this crisis. No classes have been cancelled at Gateway Seminary."

Gateway campuses in Arizona, Washington and Colorado continue to operate under local directives in place in those locations.

Southwestern Seminary cancels all spring semester events

By Staff

FORT WORTH -- The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary announced today that, due to the continuing threat of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, all seminary-sponsored, on-campus events for the spring semester, including commencement exercises, have been canceled.

"It is painful to take the unprecedented, but necessary, step of canceling our Spring commencement, since never before in our 112-year history has Southwestern Seminary not held a scheduled graduation ceremony," said President Adam W. Greenway. "I deeply regret this dramatic action, and I know it will be incredibly disappointing to our seminary and Scarborough College graduates, but I am prayerful they, as faithful Southwesterners, will understand that such a step was appropriate as the institution seeks to do what is in the best interests of our students and their families, the seminary community, and the greater Fort Worth area."

The announcement follows the seminary's March 12 coronavirus update, which entailed moving all on-campus courses to online delivery for the remainder of the spring semester, cancelling all remaining chapel services for the semester, and canceling campus events through April 4. Today's announcement extends those event cancellations through the remainder of the spring semester.

Spring 2020 graduates will receive their diplomas by mail after May 8 and will be invited to participate in the fall 2020 commencement ceremony in December.

In a video message to students, Greenway said these are "extraordinarily unprecedented times" and assured the Southwestern Seminary and Scarborough College community that their first priority is properly ministering to their families, then taking care of their churches and ministries, and, lastly, their studies.

"I want you to know that I believe very firmly that God is working already to make Southwestern Seminary a more caring place, to help provide comfort and options for students as they navigate a situation that is changing, literally, moment by moment," Greenway said. "Our team is doing everything we can to provide as seamless of an experience for our students, because at Southwestern Seminary and Scarborough College, the students are the most important members of our community."

"Know that Southwestern Seminary and Scarborough College is thankful for you being a part of our family here," Greenway concluded. "And we are excited about how God is going to, even in the midst of this crisis, use it to help connect men and women, boys and girls, to the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ."

The seminary also recently announced the launch of new, eight-week online course terms, beginning April 27, starting with nine courses in the first term, with more expected to be added throughout 2020. Although months in the making, Greenway said, "In God's providence, we are now positioned to offer these new courses at a time when they will be especially meaningful to our students."

Additionally, the seminary recently announced Virtual Preview sessions, an innovative way for prospective students to learn about academic programs and hear from Greenway and the seminary and Scarborough College faculty. With the first session scheduled for March 24, altogether 14 sessions are planned. The sessions are part of an initiative that will include a Virtual Preview Day, including a virtual tour of the Fort Worth campus. The date for the Virtual Preview Day will be announced later.