


MEMORANDUM

To: Viterbi School Faculty and Staff

From: Yannis C. Yortsos, Dean 

Date: March 15, 2020

Subject: Facing the COVID-19 Challenge

Dear Colleagues:

In these unprecedented times, we are facing different, exponentially changing, circumstances. These are not the exponential changes brought in by technological advances, most of which benefit the world in a positive way. Rather, they are driven by the dynamics of disease contagion, and affect all of us here and everywhere in the world, adversely.

Fortunately, we know how to combat this contagion. Among the most effective tools is *social distancing*, which actually means minimizing as much as possible person-to-person interaction. In fact, we are more than ever before socially connected, through the marvel of the internet and its myriad technologies.

Social distancing dictates that effective tomorrow, March 16, 2020, and until further notice, all non-essential office functions at Viterbi will be minimally staffed, with most work done remotely and on-line. Each department and office will determine how best to manage this area, so please coordinate with your supervisor, director or chair. It is also possible that new guidelines will be issued in the next few days, so please be ready for additional adjustments as needed. In a fortunate turn of events, this coming week is Spring Break week, which will allow us to test and fine-tune our new operation processes.

The Dean's office is working closely with the USC administration, with many of you in your various capacities, and with department chairs, directors and business managers. We are here to help with all issues related to remote teaching, research and business continuity, student support – and how to continue our mission as a leading engineering school in all its aspects. Please never hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

As we navigate these turbulent waters, we should always keep in mind our mission, which is to educate students, and to lead in thought and innovation. How we react in times of great uncertainty will test our values, our commitment, and our resolve. We should continue and enhance being supportive and caring for each other, understand that some in our community need more help than others, and be generous in spirit and in practice. This applies particularly in our relation to our students, including those who will remain on campus, and to the large fraction of our international students. They need our strength, our outreach and our embrace. A few months from now, when this crisis will hopefully be a distant past, we will be remembered by how we stayed true to our values.

A crisis also offers the opportunity for re-invention. We have been advocating that in times of exponential change, we should always try to innovate and re-invent. Today's different exponential disruption, demands the same, but more urgently, and for different reasons. Let us grasp the opportunity to create innovation, re-invent and lead, using our unparalleled strengths in technology and our forward-looking attitude. And let us help inspire our students, current, past and future, to work together in our mission to *engineer a better world for all humanity*.

cc: USC President Carol Folt, USC Provost Charles Zukoski