



June 25, 2020

Dear Students,

In March of this year, all of us answered a call to action to slow the transmission of COVID-19, a disease we knew very little about. At the time, it appeared that everyone was at equal risk and that our nation's health care system could be overwhelmed. In response, we took unprecedented steps to transition to remote-only teaching and learning. Most of you returned home, but some of you stayed. We suspended visits to the campus and either cancelled or postponed important and signature gatherings, including the 2020 Commencement. Those were difficult decisions, but we did what needed to be done. I am so proud of the persistence and creativity exhibited throughout our entire community.

Since then, we have learned a great deal. Indeed, we now know that the danger of the disease rests mainly with an older demographic and those with underlying conditions like diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and respiratory conditions. Further, data from the CDC tells us that this disease presents minimal risk to otherwise healthy college age students. While students are certainly not immune from the disease and can spread the virus to others, 99.9% of those without underlying health conditions in the age groups of 10-19 and 20-29 who have contracted the disease, are either asymptomatic or recover from the illness. This is not to say that the dangers of COVID-19 are to be ignored or taken lightly. Rather, the knowledge we have gained about this disease and how we treat it are helpful in informing our decisions about how we can best protect those who are most vulnerable. In short, our challenge is to devise ways of protecting those who are at greater risk while we honor the College's reason for existing—serving students who want to learn and prepare for their future.

We also know this. You want to be here! While the COVID-19 storm raged this spring, applications continued to come in, and prospective students continued to learn more about Austin College through virtual visits and discussions. Current students were reminded of what they missed so much—being on campus, being with their professors, classmates, coaches, mentors and advisers, friends and friendly faces. We were all reminded of the magic of Austin College, a community that is smart, resilient, and good to each other. All of this has resulted in a remarkable thing. Despite the challenges we faced this spring, despite the necessity of remote

teaching and learning, and despite the fear of the unknown, a robust first-year class is registered to arrive in August to begin their college experience. Our returning students have also registered in record numbers for the fall.

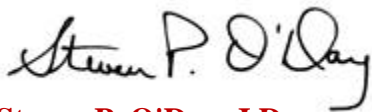
As we plan for the fall, we've also learned that everyone's personal behavior and responsibility make the biggest difference in reducing the spread of the virus. We are calling upon everyone to do their part to protect the vulnerable. This fall, campus life will be a little different, and we'll need your help.

Upon arrival in phases, students will be provided with masks. You will be asked to complete questionnaires and assess your health on a daily basis, use hand sanitizer, and take responsibility for practicing social and physical distancing. Our small class sizes have always maximized engagement between students and professors, but we'll be spacing things out even more this fall. In some cases, we'll be in larger meeting spaces for classes. In other cases, we'll be splitting up some classes and alternating between in-person and remote class sessions. Events will look different with smaller gatherings and, sometimes, no audiences or crowds. At all times, we'll ask you to wear a mask when social distancing cannot be achieved. We'll also ask everyone to honor various traffic flow modifications on campus to maximize distancing whenever possible. Further, while we will be disinfecting and cleaning areas across campus constantly, we'll be asking you to help in that effort by washing your hands frequently and following various guidelines in places like classrooms, study spaces, eating venues, residence halls and apartments, restrooms, and locker rooms. To be sure the very best treatment will be available for anyone who needs it, we'll be working in partnership with the Texoma Medical Center, highly respected and just 10 minutes from campus. Finally, we'll be adjusting the academic schedule to allow students to complete the semester from home beginning November 21st.

Yes, things will be a little different this fall, but remember that with everyone's commitment, we can be safe while still living out the unmatched Austin College experience that you'll remember for a lifetime. I know 'RooNation will do what needs to be done and do it well. For now, please know that we'll continue to monitor the situation closely. Check your email frequently for more updates and details throughout the summer.

Best wishes for a healthy and safe summer. We can't wait to see you!

Sincerely,  
President O'Day

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven P. O'Day". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'D'.

**Steven P. O'Day, J.D.**  
President

The Cecil H. and Ida M. Green  
Chair of Creative Educational Leadership