



July 8, 2020

As I am sure you are aware, the [University Homepage](#) was updated this week with the comprehensive [Return to Campus Guide](#). I encourage you to read this carefully because it is our guiding document for campus operations for the 2020-21 academic year. We will rely on these principles and protocols and as we look toward our classes and artistic projects this fall.

I want to acknowledge that recently I have heard from many of you regarding our Playhouse production season—particularly for the fall semester. We all recognize that the current COVID crisis poses challenges for theaters and for all entertainment organizations/venues: Commercial theatres (e.g. Broadway and Off-Broadway houses) have temporarily closed and most professional regional theatres have either delayed their fall production seasons or suspended their activities for the near-term. Some academic performance programs have chosen to cancel their fall production seasons but, as of this writing, the majority of university theatre and dance programs have not yet made public their fall production plans.

The Playhouse announced our 2020-21 performance season this past spring with great optimism and hope. We have been preparing for a robust/aspirational season of plays, musical and dance events for many months. It's important to note, that throughout this preparation process, we have repeatedly recognized the need to be vigilant and responsive to the ever-evolving COVID-19 environment (in fact, our [season announcement](#) begins with this acknowledgment). We have been preparing for multiple contingencies and—as previously communicated—the Playhouse and COPA, in conjunction with University leadership and in collaboration with its departments, units and programs, has been working all summer crafting discipline-specific requirements and recommendations designed to support our students.

During this uncertain time there are no simple solutions, but the Playhouse and COPA have prepared flexible plans ready to be implemented and/or adjusted based on new insights and advances as they arise.

We are now at the mid-point of summer recess. And, until just recently, the COVID-19 data across Pennsylvania and, more specifically, in Allegheny County has been encouraging. We had many weeks of continued decline and local and state officials took active steps to re-open the State. This data encouraged us to continue our scheduled production planning.

I know that you are aware that we have recently seen a reversal in this trend. Allegheny County has experienced a spike in confirmed COVID-19 cases and many states have seen significant increases (e.g. Texas, California, Florida). This new data is, of course, of great concern. To echo Harvard's/*ART Roadmap to Recovery*: Theaters need to respond dynamically to new data, and we should anticipate disruptions. This is one such *disruption* which requires us to carefully consider our next steps.

The Playhouse is currently considering a spectrum of performance options in order to serve our students artistically while ensuring the safest possible production environment. The health and safety of our students, staff and patrons is the top priority in our decision-making processes. Some of these options

include live streaming, virtual performances, and/or rescheduling the opening of our season. Like many university production programs and conservatories, we will rely on the data as well as health and industry experts to inform our decision(s).

These decisions have broad implications and cannot/should not be made in haste. We are currently modeling the various options and reviewing the academic and artistic impact. I thank you for your patience as we continue to do this important work.

Our collective desire to create and grow as artists is something that we all embrace and share. This is part of what makes these decisions difficult—even painful at times. We all want to continue to do the work that brings us joy and fulfills our creative passions. Balancing this artistic drive with the need to craft a safe and secure environment is the challenge and the goal. We will meet this challenge and the Playhouse and COPA will continue to be a center of excellence in Pittsburgh and across the country.

My best,



Steven

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Pronouns: He | Him | His ([what's this?](#))

