

February 3, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

### **Planning**

And we're off! The students are back, and the energy in Sewanee has ticked up a couple of notches ... there's even traffic! Classes are underway. It's been pretty cold in the mornings for classes in the tents. We knew it would be, which is why we delayed the start of the semester by two weeks. We also outfitted some additional larger indoor spaces with technology just in case some classes needed to move indoors for a period of time.

With the spring semester underway, the FOG is winding down. The FOG's main purpose was to plan how to open and stay open. We've done that quite successfully with the help of everyone on campus. The group will continue to meet through February to smooth out any early bumps in the road this semester that we did not encounter in the fall.

### **Testing**

The COVID-19 positivity rate of our onboarding for students was spectacular. We tested 1,414 students and had six students test positive. That is a positivity rate of 0.42%, much lower than the recent rates in Franklin County or for the state of Tennessee. We appreciate our students' cooperation with arrivals, arriving on time and on their scheduled day, waiting until they had test results to enter their residences, and maintaining the 3W's while waiting. And we have not strained our quarantine resources. Of course, this is just the first week, and each week starts a new round of testing. We'll continue to assess the positivity rate. We are prepared to increase student surveillance testing as needed to help ensure that we continue as virus-free as possible. See the University's testing results published each morning on our [Daily COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

*THANK YOU* to all the incredibly dedicated volunteers at the test site! They come from across campus and across our community. During onboarding, they processed 250 to 300 people each day with results available in four hours or less. They showed up, including Saturday and Sunday morning, and provided a cheerful and helpful atmosphere—even those who were stationed outside on some very cold mornings! We simply could not have gotten this show on the road without them. And testing will continue throughout the semester. Whenever you go to the testing site, please thank our test volunteers for helping to make our semester possible.

Don't forget that the 3W's remain our most powerful tool to combat the spread of this disease: [Wear your mask](#). Wash your hands. Watch your distance. It's important to follow good [COVID-19 protocols](#) both on campus *and off campus*, and [to continue to limit your social interactions](#).

We'll test approximately 250 employees each week going forward. As surveillance testing gets underway, I want to remind everyone that results will be available the next day, and you will receive a communication only if the results are positive. Remember that employees who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and who are working on campus may request to be tested by our team by calling 931.598.1010 (please do not show up at the Fowler test site unannounced). Employees who receive positive test results must work with their primary care providers to

determine how to proceed and must follow University policies related to COVID-19 and sick leave.

## **Vaccinations**

I know some of you have questions about COVID-19 vaccinations; students and families have been asking, too. We have [updated FAQs](#) for students about the vaccines; much of the information there will apply to faculty and staff as well. Here are a few highlights:

- If you have already been vaccinated and received the full series of shots required by your vaccine's manufacturer, please upload a copy of your documentation to [this portal](#). It is helpful for the Public Health Office to know the percentage of the Sewanee community that remains susceptible to the virus, and that data will inform our policies going forward.
- Once you have been vaccinated, you will need to continue to follow the 3W's and to be tested as requested by the University. The vaccine works well in preventing disease in those who receive it, but it is not certain to what degree the vaccine prevents asymptomatic spread of the virus to another individual.
- The vaccine does not have any effect on the validity of our PCR testing results.
- Even if you have already had COVID-19, you should still be vaccinated when you become eligible. While it is believed that those who have already had COVID-19 are less likely to be infected again, the amount of immunity conferred by a previous infection is highly variable and uncertain.
- The University is looking into the possibility of hosting vaccination events on campus for students and employees. However, the feasibility and timing of these events remain very uncertain, depending on the future availability of vaccines and the number of people on campus who might qualify. We will provide updates as they become available, but such an event is unlikely to happen this spring.

## **Other University News**

The 55 Years of Black Alumni celebration originally planned for last fall will be held virtually during the month of February (Black History Month). For almost a year, a committee of alumni and staff has worked on planning a meaningful series of events to mark this milestone. I hope you've noticed the banners up around campus! See the event information and schedule on the [55 Years website](#). In particular, you are encouraged to participate in two of the events: A Roberson Project presentation, "The Untold Tales: A Conversation on the Historic St. Mark's Community," next Thursday, Feb. 11; and a celebration Thursday, Feb. 25, to honor Eric Benjamin, C'73, who retired last summer.

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost