

February 24, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Planning

Summer planning is underway, and summer program directors are chomping at the bit to get started! Most have started to advertise and accept applications, although they are still unsure exactly what our capacity for summer programs will be. I understand the urgency and hope to move quickly at this point. We have a small group (that we are *not* calling the SMOG) that is revising current COVID-19 policies so they are applicable in general to summer programs. We'll get those out to Conference Services for distribution as quickly as possible. Summer programs will outline their protocols for meeting our COVID-19 mitigation policies and submit them for review. That's the plan. We'll move through this as quickly as we can.

We also have in mind the needs of campus offices that generally hire College students for the summer, as well as protocols around summer internships and research both on and off campus. We're also likely to have some international students who will need to remain in Sewanee again this summer. If you have a summer need that is not represented here, please let me know so we can throw it into the mix. I appreciate that many of you do not want to overload my email, but I do not want us to leave something out of the planning. That said, summer programs that regularly plan through Conference Services will receive their information through that office.

There is not much yet to say about the fall. Of course, we all hope to be back to something very close to normal. That will depend upon a lot of factors, including availability and distribution of vaccines.

COVID-19 Testing

Last week I said that we couldn't ask for better testing results, and then I was proven wrong! We ran a total of 1,831 tests last week with no student or employee positive results. That is a 0.00% positivity rate. Of course, our count restarts each week, and we've had a student test positive this week. See the University's testing results published daily on our [Daily COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

Thank you to our entire testing, tracing, isolation, quarantine, and public health team. We have many volunteers at the testing site on a daily basis and they are always cheerful and efficient. I had my monthly surveillance test last week, and I was in and out of the test site in under 10 minutes—most of the time was spent chatting and checking in with how everyone is doing. Drs. Summers and Smith in the Sewanee Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory run all those tests (thank you!). Read "[six things to know](#)" about the new lab. Our public health officials work with Student Life on student testing compliance and contact tracing. I'm glad they had a reprieve from contact tracing last week.

Drs. Summers and Smith have just begun a new study aimed at detecting COVID-19 status based simply upon the characteristics of our coughs. By pairing cough sounds with test results, they will investigate whether COVID-19 status can be predicted based on cough alone. The next time you're tested at Fowler, you will see the new cough collection station as you exit the testing

center. Participation in the study is completely voluntary. I encourage you to take a minute (or less) to “donate” the sound of your cough for this important research.

Given last week’s great test results, it can be easy to get complacent. Thank you for continuing to be mindful of the 3W’s, 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](#).

Surveillance test results are available the day after testing, 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

Although the number of new COVID-19 cases in Tennessee has dropped considerably since last month, it is still possible that the virus will begin to spread exponentially again due to new variants of the virus that appear to be transmitted more easily. Widespread vaccination is one of the best ways to prevent the rise of more variants. Tennessee moved this week to the next phase of its [allocation strategy](#), and people ages 65+ now are eligible to be vaccinated. Here are a few key points:

- The available vaccines are safe, and are recommended for most individuals 16 years of age and older. For additional information, please refer to reputable sources of information about the vaccine, such as the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.
 - [Moderna Vaccine FAQs](#)
 - [Pfizer/BioNTech FAQs](#)
- 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. 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 vaccines work well in preventing disease in those who receive them, but it is not certain to what degree the vaccines prevent asymptomatic spread of the virus to another individual.
- The vaccines do 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.

Other University News

Open Staff meetings will be held March 3 at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., via Zoom—more information will follow in the coming days. Details of actions taken by the Board of Regents at its recent meeting will be outlined by the vice-chancellor. Please send any questions or issues you would like to have addressed to Employee Advisory Committee Representative Tammy Elliott (tmelliot@sewanee.edu) or Human Resources Representative Jessica Welch (jewelch@sewanee.edu) by March 1. You can send your questions either through the SPO or to the representative's respective email address. On the recommendation of the Employee Advisory Committee, we ask that all questions include the name of the submitter (no anonymous submissions). Faculty will receive their regular report in the coming weeks.

The 55 Years of Black Alumni celebration is continuing throughout this month. The highlight this week, on Thursday, Feb. 25, will be the celebration to honor former Director of Multicultural Affairs Eric Benjamin, C'73, who retired last summer. See the event information and schedule on the [55 Years website](#). Originally planned for last fall, we are celebrating our Black Alumni 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! If you didn't have a chance to participate in the Roberson Project presentation, "The Untold Tales: A Conversation on the Historic St. Mark's Community," you can [watch the replay here](#).

EQB Reflection & Response: Thank you to the hundreds of employees who participated in the Zoom conversations about our guiding principles in response to Vice-Chancellor Brigety's remarks at Growing in Grace. Cassie Meyer, director of Dialogue Across Difference Programs, and Elizabeth Wilson, director of the Center for Leadership, facilitated these initial conversations. If you were unable to attend the online gatherings, your insights and experience about Sewanee's values, as well as your concerns, questions, and recommendations are still welcome. You can [provide your input here](#). There will also be opportunities for in-person input from Dining and Facilities Management staff over the next week.

Elizabeth and Cassie also facilitated similar conversations among College and School of Theology students. They have collected a lot of information and are working through that in order to help us plan next steps in the process. We hope to move forward with some of those steps in the coming weeks. In case you have not already viewed them, you can see the remarks Vice-Chancellor Brigety delivered during the Growing in Grace event at this [link](#).

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost