

March 24, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Planning

Summer planning is fully underway by summer program directors. As they turn in their COVID-19 mitigation plans, they are being reviewed by Conference Services and Public Health staff before receiving final approvals from senior leaders. We anticipate having a pretty full summer here in Sewanee. I'm excited about this clear step in the direction of normalcy.

If you plan to have students or program participants on campus this summer, please contact Conference Services (conferences@sewanee.edu), if you have not already done so, to make arrangements. We need to have one point of contact for each program or office to ensure that you have all the information you need and to be able to assess and accommodate your needs.

And yes, this includes individual offices that have employed students for the summer or have student interns, and faculty who have student researchers and interns. Please contact Conference Services. They can guide you through the process, which should not be terribly onerous for this category of summer participant.

With summer planning taking on a life of its own, we are turning our attention to the fall. While it is still too early to know exactly what it will look like, we are hopeful for a substantial return to normalcy. Even with wide vaccine distribution, we may need to continue to take precautions such as masking and distancing in the classroom. This may require that some classes continue to have some remote elements due to space limitations. It may even necessitate continued testing. We simply do not have the answers for many of these questions at this time, but rest assured that they are on our radar.

COVID-19 Testing

Another 1,957 tests were administered last week, and only one person tested positive, an employee. That is a 0.05% positivity rate, and we continue to see excellent results this semester. See the University's testing results published daily on our [Daily COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

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

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee announced on Monday that all Tennessee residents ages 16 and up will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccination no later than April 5. People in Phase 3 of the state's vaccine allocation strategy will also be eligible by April 5, and that specifically includes students living in residence halls. The state moved to Phase 2 of its allocation plan on March 18, making residents aged 55 and older eligible now. This is incredibly exciting and encouraging.

Widespread vaccination is one of the best ways to prevent continued spread of COVID-19 and return the University to a level of operation similar to the one that existed prior to the pandemic.

We have applied to the Tennessee Health Department to be a vaccination site for employees and students this spring, much as we were for flu shots last fall. We will keep you updated when we have more information about the likelihood of this taking place before the semester concludes, as well as details including the brand of vaccine we will offer (when and if everything comes together). To learn more about the development, safety, and efficacy of the available vaccines, remember to complete the online training module in [Brightspace](#) (offered in person in some departments).

If you are eligible to receive a vaccine now and don't want to wait for an on-campus vaccination event, remember that the University will provide up to three paid hours for work time missed while receiving a COVID-19 vaccination to better allow employees to schedule vaccination appointments. Employees will also receive one paid day off following the final shot prescribed by your vaccine's manufacturer to allow recovery time from any potential symptoms due to an immune response. See details on the [Human Resources website](#).

Mental Health Resources

I want to remind you of the mental health resources that Dr. Nicole Noffsinger-Frazier brought to our attention recently. We are midway through the spring semester. With the late start and no spring break this year, the semester might seem longer than normal. In addition, while we have had some tantalizing tastes of good weather, there will still be plenty of cold and fog interspersed with it. It's important to pay attention to changes you may be experiencing in your own well-being, as well as changes you may notice in your colleagues. Prioritize your self-care, and reach out to your colleagues with kindness to share a thoughtful word or gesture. Seek support when you need to do so. You might consider using a mental health app that all Sewanee students and employees now have *free** access to: [Sanvello](#). Sanvello is one of the highest-rated apps for managing stress, anxiety, and depression. This app can be used by anyone with a [sewanee.edu](#) email account; use your Sewanee email address to set up your Sanvello account. Employees also have access to counseling services through the University's Employee Assistance Program. Details are found on the [Human Resources](#) website.

**Free access is provided with funding from a SAMHSA, Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grant.*

Other University News

Staff Survey: The Employee Advisory Committee's survey subcommittee that will administer an Employee Satisfaction Survey this spring. This survey is scheduled every three years. Look for an announcement soon about when the survey will launch.

Starting Wage Group: As you know there has been a lot of discussion across campus about Sewanee's starting wage. I thought you might like to know that there is a group that is actively studying this topic and reviewing options. The group includes the new vice provost, the treasurer, the Joint Faculties Budget Priorities Committee, staff from the Human Resources office, a representative from the Student Government Association, a member of the Board of Regents, and me. This is just the start of the process, and we don't have anything concrete to report yet, but our work will help inform the University's budget development process that is getting underway for next year. The group has met twice to review Sewanee's data on wages and benefits as well as comparable data from other small liberal arts colleges. We heard from interested individuals and supervisors of some of our lower-paid staff. We also discussed the impact that a national change in the minimum wage might have on Sewanee.

Biehl Commons: Several of you were able to "tune in" to a Zoom meeting last week where the topic of discussion was program and design development of the Biehl Commons. The project architects outlined the results of the schematic design phase of our planning; look for more information about this within the next week.

The program planning group began the process in fall 2019 with design workshops for the entire campus to discuss ways to provide better student social and gathering space. Last spring, the program committee met to further develop the ideas proposed in the campus workshops. The schematic design is the result of their work. With its prominent location on the corner of University and South Carolina avenues, the new Biehl Commons will offer opportunities to leverage the natural connections to the historic Quad, the Wellness Commons, and Abbo's Alley.

Thank You: I want to extend another heartfelt thank you to everyone involved with our testing program. Not only are they allowing us to provide safe, in-person on-campus instruction for our students—a hallmark of the Sewanee experience—they are also critical to our ability to host the many sporting events scheduled this semester for our student-athletes. The latter effort often requires the testing team to work on weekends. This dedicated group includes the Sewanee Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory staff, Alyssa Summers, Clint Smith and Marya Ashby. At the Fowler Center test site, Jane Hawkins, Sarah Richey, Stacey O'Sullivan, Stefanie Kennedy, Tori Hinshaw, Mariel Gingrich, Mary Heath, Lee Ann Backlund, Merritt Yackey, Robie Jackson, John Solomon, Kathy Soloman, and numerous others do a great deal of work—unseen by most of us—to support our efforts.

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost