

July 22, 2020

Dear Friends,

#ProtectTheBubble

Last week Vice-Chancellor Brigety held two Zoom webinars for families in which he outlined Sewanee's approach to bringing students safely back to campus. These sessions were recorded, and you can watch them [here](#) and [here](#). In the course of these webinars, "Protect the Bubble" became a catchphrase and it has stuck. As this is an emerging concept, our understanding of what this means for various constituencies is emerging as well. Let me give this a shot.

"Protect the Bubble" means that we need to diminish contacts with individuals outside our "trust circles" to the greatest degree possible. Does that look exactly the same for every constituency? I wish it did because that would make this easier. If we were actually a cruise ship, an analogy many are using for colleges and universities in the fall, we could absolutely control every coming and going. But we cannot. So the devil is in the details and this will not look the same for everyone. However, the concept is the same for everyone: Do everything you can to limit your outside contacts, and whether you are in the bubble or outside it, follow the "Three Ws" (wash your hands, wear your mask, watch your distance).

The reason for limiting outside contacts is to decrease the probability that *you* will bring the novel coronavirus back to campus. While it is likely that we will have cases on campus this fall, we need to avoid, as much as possible, multiple vectors bringing the virus back to campus. This could lead to a community outbreak that would force us to shut down campus and send students home as we did in the spring. If that were to happen again, given the financial impact this pandemic has already had on the University, it would have a dramatic impact on our budget. It is up to each of us to do our part to keep the University open this fall.

For employees, limiting outside contacts does not necessarily mean no travel outside the Sewanee bubble. Many of us go home outside the bubble every day and have been doing so for months. But we should still limit, to the extent possible, our contacts outside our normal family circle. You know your bubble. Protect your bubble to protect our bubble. I know that many of us do not live in an area that supports our Three Ws, especially wearing a mask. Now, many major retailers such as Walmart, CVS, and Kroger are assisting our efforts by requiring masks. Please protect your bubble. Not just for us, but for yourself and your loved ones, too.

What does protecting the bubble mean for our academic programs? Many of you have spent months planning meaningful academic and co-curricular programming (some of it off the Domain) for our college students. The state of the ongoing pandemic has changed dramatically in the past couple of weeks, and it will continue to develop. Unfortunately, it is not changing for the better. The novel coronavirus has continued to spread and is reaching into rural areas like ours, making travel to sites off the Domain much riskier than it was four to six weeks ago. Therefore, travel off the Domain for academic courses and student engagement activities is prohibited. I know this will come as a disappointment and will be frustrating. I am very sorry.

We must weigh the benefits of program activities against the ramifications of vacating campus and converting to fully online instruction.

We know that despite all our efforts, we *will* have cases on campus this fall. When we do, we will work to track and stop the spread of the virus. Sewanee's strategy relies on both individual responsibility and our collective response. Individual responsibility will involve each one of us being diligent about practicing the "Three Ws"—Wash your hands, Wear a mask, Watch your distance—where watching your distance includes limiting your contacts outside your personal bubble.

Employee Testing

As you know, employee testing for COVID-19 started last week. An example of the University's collective response, this testing is intended, to the best of the University's ability, to prevent the spread of the virus, to protect the health and safety of us all, and to be able to maintain University operations. Testing is occurring at Cravens Hall, which is also where students will be tested upon their arrival. We are stress-testing our procedures, and they are well-established at this point.

Most of us have been tested by now, although a couple days of testing remain. Our test results will be incorporated into the test results for the state and the county of residence of each employee tested. As of this morning we had tested 405 employees and students with one confirmed positive result for the coronavirus among employees. We are developing [a page on our COVID-19 website](#) where we will track our student and employee test results and COVID-19 cases; look for more information to be added as we go forward.

Each person tested is notified of the outcome of the test within 24 hours either by email or phone call from a University public health officer or Human Resources. Anyone with a positive test result should contact their personal health care provider and follow the provider's medical advice. A period of isolation will be required before returning to work. Following established University and state protocols, HR and our Public Health Office are collaborating with the Tennessee Department of Health and directly with any employee with positive test results to conduct contact tracing and notify close contacts of the positive test.

- Close contacts are individuals who are known to have been in contact (within six feet) for 15 minutes or longer with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19.
- In collaboration with the University's Public Health Office, HR personnel have been trained to conduct contact tracing for both on- and off-campus contacts.

The University understands that the information needed to carry out these health and safety protocols is confidential and private, and is protected under the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Answers to frequently asked questions about testing and other health and safety issues, including masking, screening, quarantine, isolation and tracing, can be found at [this link](#).

Assistance Needed

Related to our institutional health and safety efforts, we have a volunteer opportunity.

- **Cravens Test Site Volunteers:** We are in need of 30 volunteers who can work during the morning hours (7:30-10:30 a.m.) between July 31 and Aug. 16. Duties are primarily shepherding employees and arriving students through the stages of the test process, answering questions, and completing paperwork. Depending on the number of volunteers, there is an opportunity to divide into two shifts with a smaller time commitment.

If you're interested in volunteering, please email Stacey O'Sullivan directly (smosulli@sewanee.edu).

Athletics

You are probably aware by now that the Southern Athletic Association Presidents' Council made the difficult decision to [suspend all conference competition](#) for the fall semester. Sewanee's athletic teams will not play against outside competition this fall. The decision is unfortunate but necessary. We know that athletics is important to the Sewanee student experience and to our students' physical and mental health, so coaches will conduct team meetings, practice sessions, and workouts for student-athletes. This information is important for our undergraduates as they decide whether or not to return to campus.

Modes of Instruction

Late last week College students were able to check to see the mode of instruction planned for each of their classes. Several offices received questions from families about the proportion of remote-only courses that their students would have, especially those students who plan to be on campus. We are stressing to undergraduate students and their families that remote learning will be very different this fall from their experience during the spring semester.

All courses that are taught remotely will have real-time synchronous elements. The faculty in both the College and the School of Theology have spent the entire summer, starting in May, training in excellence in remote learning. Our emphasis has been that we should have *establishing community* as a course goal for every course, and the faculty wholeheartedly agree. They are planning for the challenges of teaching online or in person and working to ensure that all our students feel fully supported and stay engaged.

As noted recently by Professor Al Bardi: "Our faculty are using the pandemic challenges as opportunities to innovate and to discover new ways to productively engage students. Many are also using the current pandemic as an opportunity to rethink their disciplinary assumptions and generate new avenues of theory, discourse, and study. They are not letting technology or safety constraints dictate or hamstring their pedagogy. On the contrary, they innovate, overcome, and reflectively engage our students in the new processes they discover."

Thus, I do not believe that our remote learning approach, or the experience that our students will have learning remotely, will be of an inferior quality. Quite the opposite, I believe it will be vastly superior to that provided by most other institutions.

Admission Office Now Open to Visitors

As I mentioned in my communication last week, the undergraduate admission office opened for visitors on Monday, July 20. For the first time since March, prospective students and families are able to visit campus and participate in self-guided tours. To safeguard our campus community as well as our visitors, visitors must follow the vice-chancellor's mask directive. In addition, registered visitors will complete a COVID-19 self-assessment before they arrive, and visitors who enter Fulford Hall must have their temperature checked before continuing their tour. Admission counselors will not meet with families in person; online visit options remain available. If you see prospective families on campus, please welcome them as warmly as you always do—from at least six feet away!

From My Perspective

Some of you might have been surprised to see “Protect the Bubble” emerge as a catchphrase as we prepare to bring students back to campus. After all, you've heard both student groups and University offices say for years that Sewanee is not a “bubble”—though somewhat remote, it's not a place that's insulated from and uncaring about the world's problems.

It's precisely because we cannot be insulated from the coronavirus that we must create and protect a metaphorical "bubble"—by closely monitoring the virus and acting resolutely to prevent its spread and mitigate its effects on campus and in the community.

This is the sense I hope #ProtectTheBubble captures. The University is not turning inward; we will continue to be engaged (albeit mostly virtually, for a while) with the community and the world. But while the pandemic surges in many cities and states, at Sewanee we will rely on our supportive community atmosphere—and protect the bubble.

It is easy to dive into the weeds when faced with a new “rule.” We want to know where the line is so that we don't go over it. This is natural. In this case, please keep our larger goal in mind. We need to prevent an outbreak on campus. Ask yourself if you are doing something risky. If the answer is yes, or if you are not sure, please don't do it.

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost