

August 12, 2020

Dear Friends,

### **Student Arrivals**

Students are excited to come to, and come back to, Sewanee. Of the 1,756 total college students eligible for enrollment this fall, 1,718 (97.8%) plan to enroll. This is amazing when you hear about what is happening at other schools. For instance, Harvard had 340 first-year students defer their enrollment, three times its usual number, as reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Of our 1,718 students who plan to enroll, 1,540 (89.6%) plan to be on campus. This is about 110-130 fewer students than we normally have on campus. The rest (178) plan to study remotely.

The School of Theology is welcoming one of its largest classes in several years. Most students have already arrived, several of them with their families. When they arrived we tested their entire families for COVID-19. Theology students have the option to participate in classes either in person or remotely during the Advent term. Morning Prayer has been modified in light of the pandemic, and those participating in person will practice masking and social distancing; others will be able to participate via livestream.

This week is the big push with student arrivals. Each day we will have about 200 college students arriving. So far things have gone relatively smoothly. Keep track of our testing results with our [Daily COVID-19 Dashboard](#). We continue to consider more descriptive ways to present our results.

All of our planning for COVID-19 preparedness undergoes intensive discussion prior to implementation, and insights are gleaned quickly. These insights can send us back to the drawing board to “reduce friction in the process,” as David Shipps is fond of saying. For instance, many of you who originally volunteered to help with move-in noted that we changed our protocol. Specifically, we are no longer allowing college students to move into their residence halls while awaiting test results. Instead, students who cannot remain with their families or self-isolate while waiting are put into small groups led by volunteers. Importantly, this plan incorporated guidance from our public health staff, and using group volunteers is a more reliable way to ensure our health practices are scrupulously followed by students. So as we implement our plans throughout the semester, expect to see course changes. It does not mean that anyone has failed. It just means that we have found a way to improve something.

### **Volunteers Still Needed**

And speaking of volunteers and move-in, we can still use your help. This year more than usual, families and students are feeling uncertain about what life will be like on campus. If your supervisor agrees and you can take the time to volunteer, please do.

- Move-in: You can make students feel welcome as they transition to campus. Volunteers are still needed through Sunday, Aug. 16, to help groups of five to 10 students engage in healthy distancing activities, indoors or out, until their test results are available. Please sign up [here](#).

## **Student Quarantine and Isolation**

As mentioned last week, a student who tests positive for COVID-19 upon arrival in Sewanee will isolate. If they live within a reasonable drive from campus, we are asking them to return home to isolate for a period of at least 14 days. This will both give their family the comfort of being able to monitor the student's health at home, and keep our quarantine and isolation spaces available for others who live far from campus.

If a student is unable to return home for isolation, they will isolate at St. Mary's and will participate in their classes remotely. Faculty have gone the extra mile to ensure that any student quarantined or isolated at any point during the semester will be able to participate in their courses, even if the course is normally delivered predominantly in-person. Sick students will receive medical care via telemedicine or in person from the health care professionals in our University Wellness Center. Our close partnership with STRHS will help us manage any severe health challenges.

Related to this is how we are handling the circumstance of students who have tested positive earlier in the year. [As our FAQs state](#), we will consider admitting a student who tested positive earlier in the year if it is determined that they have been symptom-free after completing 10+ days of isolation, are cleared by their local department of health and/or their physician, and have sufficient supporting documentation. As this situation has become more common over time, the Wellness Center communicated with parents who made inquiries during the summer that they should provide this information, if applicable to their student, for consideration as part of the student's re-entry. Our public health officers and Wellness Center staff will make these determinations together on a case-by-case basis.

## **COVID-19 Training**

Please remember to complete your COVID-19 training in [Brightspace](#) as outlined by Mary Wilson, director of human resources. This training takes less than 30 minutes to complete. All employees are required to complete this training by Monday, Aug. 17, the first day of undergraduate classes. Students also are completing this COVID-19 training as they wait for their test results.

## **Daily Screening Using the Ascend Platform**

Don't forget your daily screening if you plan to be on campus. According to the [CDC](#), daily screening of workers and others entering the workplace for symptoms of COVID-19 is an important component of preventing transmission and protecting workers. Many of us have been doing daily temperature checks since June, and these established routines will continue within each department. The Ascend platform takes us through a set of daily health questions.

Ascend is a web-based platform that provides a "checkmark" for the day, indicating that you are free to report to the classroom or office. If you want to use it on your phone, start with this [link to the Ascend website](#). Note that if you want to save the page for future reference (to bookmarks, favorites, or the home screen) you must do so before entering any data. If you log in and complete the screening using your phone, you will be able to show your checkmark for the day on your phone in order to move about campus. While having a checkmark will allow us to enter

buildings and spaces shared with others without re-screening, some offices may still ask you to sign in for contact tracing purposes.

### **Facilities Opening**

In case you have not heard, some facilities that have been closed for quite some time are now opening up in preparation for the coming semester.

- **Fowler Center:** The Fowler Center is opening to student athletes only Aug. 10–16, and then to faculty and staff also on Aug. 17, and finally to retirees and faculty/staff dependents on Aug. 31. That’s the plan at this time. In addition, Fowler Center staff have moved all the exercise equipment into the fieldhouse to allow for distancing, and will close frequently for disinfecting. You can find the daily schedules and answers to your questions in the [FAQ](#) on the Athletics website.
- **duPont Library:** The Jessie Ball duPont Library is open for students, faculty, and staff only. The library will continue to provide contactless pick-up for community members. Check out their [website](#) for daily hours. You can also find their future hours and their capacity monitor at this link on the site: “[How busy is the library right now?](#)”
- **Stirling’s:** Stirling’s Coffee House is open with new procedures. You can pre-order using the Toast Takeout app or by calling 931.598.1786 (no walk-up orders). A limited menu is available to start. Orders can be picked up on the side porch.
- **University Bookstore:** The new University Bookstore in the Village will be open for business this Friday! Hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

### **#ProtectTheBubble**

Vice-Chancellor Brigety provided a video update to the “Sewaniverse” earlier this week. It outlined the University’s efforts to keep the community healthy and mostly on campus for the semester—including testing, tracing, masking, using socially distanced classrooms, and discouraging visitors from coming to campus. [Watch it here.](#)

### **Verizon Cell Service Coming Soon**

During a community webinar on Aug. 5, Vice-Chancellor Brigety shared the news that the new cell tower will be located in the rear tailgate area of Harris Stadium (the football stadium). This was the original location proposed for the cell tower and approved by the Franklin County Zoning Commission last year. Vogue Towers will construct the cell tower, and Verizon will be the tower’s initial cell provider.

As the vice-chancellor explained, reliable cell service is an absolute necessity, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Should a resident or student fall ill or have another emergency, they must be able to reach someone for help. A tower at the original location will be the fastest solution for improved cell coverage in Sewanee.

We hope that the new tower will be up and providing service by the end of the calendar year. In the meantime, the University is working with Vogue to provide a temporary solution: Verizon would deliver an emergency mobile tower on the back of a truck, as is commonly used in emergencies when cellular service is down after a disaster such as a weather event. You can find [more details about the project here](#).

### **From My Perspective**

Routines are important. They help to make something in our lives predictable. They are something we can control, so they have become especially important in this very unpredictable time. I used to stop in at Stirling's on my way to the office for coffee every day. The very same coffee every time—the Sewanee Mist—either hot or cold, depending on the season. Very predictable. The only question came up as the seasons changed in November and March. When I would switch from iced to hot with steamed half-and-half? When would I switch from hot back to iced? It was almost exciting! And comforting in its predictability. Of course, once I got to the office, all bets were off as far as routine was concerned, but that's another story. At least I had my coffee.

I'm still predictable about my coffee, but my routine changed. I make my coffee at home in the evening and put it in the fridge (after I add plenty of sugar!). Then in the morning I can make my own sweetened iced coffee with plenty of half-and-half. David has even started having coffee every day after lunch. New routines. Comforting.

College students are coming back en masse this week. Less routine and less comforting; exciting and downright scary. I am right there with you. We'll clearly need to work out some brand-new routines! But I have been greatly heartened by what I have seen in the past week. We have hundreds of students on campus and they are wearing their masks, they are distancing, they are sitting outside in camp chairs, they are paying attention in their outdoor classes. They want to be here and they want this to be successful. There will be many moments when we'll need to take a breath (masked, of course), count to 10, and make a course correction. I can hardly believe that the fall semester is about to begin!

And may I just add: MASKING, MASKING, MASKING! #ProtectTheBubble

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost