

August 26, 2020

Dear Friends,

It's official. Last week, before we completed the first week of the fall semester in the College, and before classes even started at the School of Theology, we started to look toward the spring semester. We are already considering issues like the academic calendar, our ability to use outside spaces such as sheds and tents in February and March, move-in and testing with a staggered return to campus after the holidays, and in general, what the spring semester might look like. How does the possibility of a vaccine affect our spring planning? Will there be athletics, and if so, will we really have competitions for all varsity sports crammed into one semester? At least we will go into this round of planning with more experience to build upon!

COVID-19 Testing

A successful testing regimen is key to our on-campus strategy. Thanks to the herculean efforts of our testing team, which includes University Health Services staff Karen Tharp, Nick Liston-Avnaim, Kim Bradford, and Marya Ashby, and numerous volunteers, we are testing all students once again this week. Retesting students last week went very well with only two students testing positive, a positivity rate of 0.13%. Outstanding. We'll see how it goes this week and then decide on our testing plan for next week. Students are taking the retesting seriously; they are showing up and getting into the community spirit we'll need to make it through this pandemic. See the University's testing results on our [Daily COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

This week we are beginning to retest employees, so please be on the lookout for an email requesting that you arrive at the new test site in the parking lot behind Fulford Hall. Members of certain departments and many who commute will be some of the first tested. Negative results will be communicated by email from HR, generally within one to two days. Any employee who tests positive will receive a phone call.

In the event an employee experiences COVID-19 symptoms and would like to be tested, they will undergo the same procedure as their initial University-administered saliva test. Upon receipt of positive test results, employees must work with their primary care providers (PCP) in order to determine how to proceed given established University policies related to COVID-19 specifically, and taking ordinary sick leave. The University will not provide medical counsel in any form, and employees are solely responsible for seeking any follow-up medical care needed upon receipt of COVID-19 test results. For employees without a PCP, the period of quarantine or isolation will be determined by the University's Office of Public Health in consultation with the [Tennessee Department of Health](#).

Anti-Viral Surface Treatment

Last weekend, contractors were on campus applying SurfaceWise, an antimicrobial coating that lasts for 90 days, in academic and many office buildings as well as McClurg, Fowler, duPont,

and Cravens. The product was applied using electrostatic sprayers to attract and bind the coating to surfaces, ensuring 100% surface coverage. It protects surfaces against viruses and bacteria, including the novel coronavirus, and is intended to prevent recontamination (despite frequent cleaning) in spaces that are heavily used. The product is safe, non-toxic, and contains no volatile organic compounds. It is one more tool we are using to prevent infections from spreading on campus this fall.

Dining

In order to #ProtectThe Bubble, students cannot leave the Domain to go to restaurants, so we are providing more meal options on campus. Chef Rick sent an update to students this week, letting them know about expanded hours at McClurg and other campus eateries. He is also offering “pop-up” meals at various outdoor locations. These options still are available only to College students, although faculty, staff, and seminarians are welcome at Stirling’s (use the [Toast Takeout app](#) or call ahead to order).

These additional offerings and “pop-up” sites add a lot of work for Dining leadership and staff. We are grateful for their ingenuity and creativity as they strive to ensure that students have a positive, delicious, and healthy dining experience amid the stress this time is creating.

Flu Shots

Flu shots will be offered to all employees this year. Through collaboration between University Health Services and the Tennessee Department of Health, the University received a commitment of enough flu shots for all employees and students. As we move into the fall, look for more details about when and where you can receive a flu shot.

The CDC and other medical experts strongly recommend that everyone receive the flu vaccine this year. From the CDC: “There are many benefits from flu vaccination and preventing flu is always important, but in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s even more important to do everything possible to reduce illnesses and preserve scarce health care resources.”

From My Perspective

This is going to be an incredibly fluid semester. Faculty are using new technologies, sometimes learning as they go and shifting strategies to maximize their effectiveness. Outdoor classrooms are great until outdoor noises such as wood chippers or rain pounding on the roof intervene. Student participation in classes in-person or remotely will be changing on a daily basis as students are required to isolate or quarantine based on testing results and behaviors, further complicating faculty members’ plans. Oh, and you never know what might happen with the county schools, further complicating the lives of employees who need to care for school-aged children.

We’ve already adjusted on a number of things—calling audibles. We are no longer attempting to use the Ascend health screening platform, and we changed our thinking around surveillance retesting and around some COVID-19 compliance-related sanctions. And you never know when

we might need to send students home. Student Life is working on an evacuation plan so that we can implement it at a moment's notice if necessary.

Each of these modifications and complications has ripple effects across numerous offices. Getting through this semester is going to take patience, understanding, and compassion. It is going to take those things that are likely to be in pretty short supply right now.

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost