

October 7, 2020

Dear Friends,

### **Spring Planning**

We are making progress in our planning for the spring semester. We have approved a calendar for spring and are making announcements today to the appropriate audiences. Classes in both the College and the School of Theology will begin on Monday, Feb. 1. Read the full announcements: [College](#) | [School of Theology](#).

We are using many outdoor classrooms this fall, and this later start date will eliminate approximately three weeks of cold-weather classes. At the same time, this start date is not so late that we disrupt the University's summer programs. We have canceled spring break in order to #ProtectTheBubble, but we will intersperse some midweek reading days to provide a break for both students and faculty. The last day of classes for the School of Theology will be May 5, and classes will end on May 12 for the College.

As we did in August, we plan to have staggered student arrivals, testing, and move-in again, but we have not determined the final dates or the timeframe. We'll need to consider the arrival of our student athletes, and that will depend upon the status of their season. So we will likely need to work out a couple of different College student arrival schedules. Flexibility is the name of the game.

We do not know if we will be able to hold in-person Commencement exercises this spring. That will depend upon any improvements in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we are reserving some dates for 2021 Commencements, even if they occur virtually again. Those dates are May 16 in the School of Theology for the class of 2021, and May 23 for Commencement in the College. If we are able to have the 2020 graduates return to Sewanee for in-person Commencements, those would be held on May 30, 2021, for the College (note the change from an earlier announcement that it would be held May 16), and at a date to be determined for the School of Theology.

### **Winter Break**

Another time period for which we are planning is the break from Nov. 20 through Jan. 31. While most students will be gone, some students, including many international students, may stay on campus for the duration of the break. We'll need to review all of our interim policies for students and employees to ensure that everyone understands the rules related to travel and COVID-related issues. I will be able to say more about that as our planning progresses, but I wanted you to know that this is on our radar and that we will communicate about decisions in a timely manner.

### **Summer 2021**

Yep—we are already getting questions about summer school and summer programs. No, we don't have any clear answers yet, but this is also on our radar.

## **Testing**

COVID-19 testing moved this week to the Fowler Center. As the weather changes, this site will be more hospitable for those being tested and for our volunteers working at the test site. The entire operation is located within the netted lower basketball courts in the field house. Entrances and exits are through the doors at the lower level. Please follow the signs. Other operations within the Fowler Center, such as the workout equipment, are not being affected.

We have seen an uptick in positive tests among employees. Please remember to practice good COVID-19 protocols *both on campus and off campus*: Limit your social interactions, wash your hands thoroughly, and keep wearing your mask. For our ongoing employee retesting, please be on the lookout for an email requesting that you arrive at the test site at the Fowler Center for a retest. We are continuing to test members of certain departments and many employees who commute for work.

Please remember that employees who receive a positive COVID-19 test result at another testing location, such as a county health department, must notify their supervisor, the [Office of Public Health](#), and Human Resources. Employees may receive up to 10 days of paid leave if they are in quarantine or isolation due to being in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 or if they have a suspected or diagnosed case of COVID-19 themselves, and if they are unable to work remotely. Contact Human Resources to request a leave of absence with pay. [The interim policies are here.](#)

In the event an employee experiences COVID-19 symptoms and would like to be tested, they should just email [publichealth@sewanee.edu](mailto:publichealth@sewanee.edu) or call 931.598.1010 to arrange to be tested from their car at the Fowler Center test site. Upon receipt of positive test results, employees must work with their primary care providers to determine how to proceed based on University policies related to COVID-19.

Student positive tests have remained low with only one positive this past week—that is one in the past three weeks. Every Monday starts a new round, and so far we have not strained our quarantine resources. See the University's testing results published each morning on our [Daily COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

## **Free Flu Shots Available Oct. 12 and 16**

Health professionals always recommend getting a flu shot. This year, it's especially important.

- We are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a flu shot is an essential way to help you stay healthy this year.
- Fewer cases of the flu will help decrease the burden of illness on our local health care system.
- Flu and COVID-19 can have very similar symptoms, so it is best to protect yourself against influenza now in order to make diagnosis easier should you become ill.

Students are receiving flu shots this week when they get their weekly COVID-19 tests.

The flu vaccine will be available at no cost to employees during two clinics to be held on Oct. 12 and 16 at the Fowler Center. This year we can offer both the traditional flu vaccine and the high-dose vaccine that is recommended for people ages 65 and up. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity!

Drop by next Monday or Friday between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. as your schedule allows, and follow the COVID-19 test site signs. Please note that the time period from noon to 1:30 p.m. typically has a higher volume of students testing at the site. Adjust your drop-in time as you feel appropriate. *Update: If you can't make it next week, you can get your flu shot this week as well, while students are getting theirs.*

### **Thank You**

There are *so* many people, divisions, offices, and areas to thank that I am dedicating some space in every communication this semester to mention a group or two and outline some of the things they have been working on. There is danger in doing this, I know. I'm likely to leave someone out who really deserves mention. And yet, I think it is important that everyone across campus understands what others are contributing to our efforts, even if that work is not immediately visible.

The **Admission and Financial Aid** division pivoted quickly in March to make certain that families and students had the information they needed to be here in August, while also beginning to recruit the Class of 2025. Beth Cragar and her team managed to review an increased number of financial aid appeals due to COVID-19. In addition to making the initial awards and adjusting awards where needed, Dean Cragar went above and beyond her usual work to distribute money from the CARES Act. Her thoughtful approach and care are the hallmark of the Sewanee student experience. The enrollment part of the division quickly learned how best to promote this place virtually so students could get a sense of life on the Domain—in the classroom and in student life—on an individual level. This fall the “travel” includes virtual high school visits, “attending” college fairs, “hosting” receptions, and offering virtual one-on-one conversations. These activities have kept the counselors on Zoom more than one might imagine! The team in operations provides the valuable support needed to communicate in a timely manner with students, parents, and counselors about Sewanee. They continue to find approaches to connect in interesting ways with prospective students both domestic and international through Sewanee Sessions, videos, phone calls, and handwritten notes. The creativity and care shown by the entire team will carry us into the future.

### **From My Perspective**

Here's what I'd like you all to do: Thank a student. Thank all of them you see. We have all put a lot of time and effort into our strategy. All the testing, tracing, quarantine and isolation protocols; the difficulty of teaching in hybrid mode; the extraordinary changes in Sewanee Dining; the added cleaning protocols ... it goes on and on. But we always knew that even if we put perfect protocols in place our success would really be *their* success. We all have our favorite other-university disaster stories to point to, and we almost had our own. Indeed, we still could. I wasn't sure we would get this far because I wasn't sure our students would get us here. But now I think

they will carry us to the finish line. They are tired, lonely, and anxious, but also really darned happy to be here. We told them at the beginning of the semester that it was up to them. They have given up a lot in the way of a “normal” college experience for *this* college experience, their COVID college experience. They are not perfect—but they have been pretty darned close.

So thank them for the success we have all enjoyed thus far—for doing their part to allow the rest of us to continue to do what we love, and to keep the jobs we need.

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost