

December 2, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you all had a happy, healthy, and relaxing break last week.

Vice-Chancellor Brigety sent an email to the entire Sewanee family yesterday explaining his [decision to step down](#) at the end of the semester in order to be fair to the University. He wrote that if he were to be nominated by President Joe Biden to serve as the U.S. ambassador to the Republic of South Africa, he would feel a duty to accept the nomination. When you see him, please thank the VC for his service to Sewanee, and wish him, Leelie, Roebel, Redda, and Buna well!

The leadership team recognizes that this is change on top of transition on top of a pandemic—it's a lot to process and might feel overwhelming. We are working hard to make the transition as smooth as possible, and the Regents have promised to keep the campus community informed about the next steps for the University.

### **COVID-19 Updates**

**Omicron variant:** As outlined in an [email from Vice-Chancellor Brigety](#) on Monday, we are paying close attention to developments regarding the Omicron variant, which was classified as a “variant of concern” by the [World Health Organization](#) last week. We will continue to consult with both [Dr. Paul Erwin, C'79](#), and [Dr. Walter Merrill, C'70](#), to benefit from their insight. At present, no changes will be made to our current campus policies, but we should remain flexible given the evolution of this disease. The Omicron variant was identified in the U.S. yesterday for the first time. The University encourages all eligible students, faculty, and staff to schedule and receive a COVID-19 vaccination booster shot as soon as possible. You can find local vaccination sites at the [vaccine.gov website](#).

Just as with the Delta variant, the Sewanee Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory would be able to identify a suspected Omicron variant through sequencing certain viral genes. However, in both cases, because they don't have the ability to sequence the entire viral genome, they cannot say with 100% certainty that a variant is either the Delta or Omicron variant.

It is easy to forget that even fully vaccinated persons need to mask indoors. Please be gracious in reminding others of the masking policy, and when you are reminded!

### **News from the Cabinet**

The Vice-Chancellor's Cabinet meets weekly. We discuss strategic and emerging issues, as well as participate in training and workshops. For instance, a couple weeks ago we all participated in approximately six hours of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) training on emergency preparedness and will have a follow-up tabletop exercise in January. We also heard from visiting DEI expert Lawrence Alexander, followed by conversation on our own DEI issues and emerging strategies with Sibby Anderson-Thompkins.

Part of each Cabinet meeting is devoted to hearing from the various members to learn about their work, priorities, challenges, and opportunities. This helps us to ensure we are integrating our work across offices and divisions as much as possible. This week we heard from three areas:

The **Office of Marketing & Communications and Print Services** works with nearly every department, office, and program on campus to [help solve problems and achieve results](#). Usually they do this by helping to tell Sewanee's stories—about our students, our programs, our alumni, and our employees. These stories appear on the web, on social media, in email, on video, and in print materials. They enhance the University's reputation, broaden its reach, support recruitment, and strengthen bonds with alumni, parents, our community, and indeed the world. In 2022, they are hoping to expand the University's digital capabilities and develop a community of campus communicators in order to collaborate with other storytellers on campus. [Want to be part of the fun?](#)

The **Facilities Management** team consistently delivers in clutch situations. They continue to dedicate energy and manpower to the various unexpected situations that have occurred this semester. For example, FM is determined to wipe out the persistent flea infestation in the Bairnwick Women's Center and are hopeful this will be resolved after a second round of fumigation treatment in December. They also managed a major plumbing clog in drain lines leaving Trezevant Hall. The FM team pooled in-house resources with outside contractors and reached a timely solution. They will install new drain lines soon to prevent this issue from recurring in the future. FM will be coordinating all the office moves for the transition to the newly renovated Carnegie Hall in early January, and they are planning now for summer deferred-maintenance projects. These are on top of their regular responsibilities to keep the grounds looking great and participation in management of events such as convocations and Lessons and Carols. The FM team asks that you use its [website](#) to submit work requests. This cuts down on phone calls, email traffic, and repetitive work required to enter the information into their electronic system. Thanks!

**Student Life** has had a very busy semester. Student housing is quite full, and the energy of our students is palpable. In addition to managing housing emergencies with Facilities Management and their regular duties, they are working on several projects. A group of faculty, staff, and students is looking at how we can improve the onboarding experience for all of our new students. The CARE Team, an interdisciplinary group focused on supporting students in need of additional resources, has been working to address issues of personal wellness, academic difficulties, physical/mental illnesses, and suicidal tendencies. Our students report being just as stressed and burned out as staff and faculty as a result of the pandemic. The CARE team asks that we extend grace whenever possible as we all work together to wrap up another unique term. Student Accessibility Services has provided support to more students this semester than during the entirety of the 2020-2021 academic year. The work includes academic, housing, and dining accommodations, academic coaching, captioning, COVID-19 medical vaccination exemptions, medical withdrawals, and emotional support animal wrangling. The Greek Life office is focusing on hazing prevention with bystander intervention curriculum for spring 2022, and on providing Greek Life goals for the student success strategic plan. And finally, the Sewanee Outing Program has been getting our students outside. Most weeks offer 12 to 14 trips. The week prior to Thanksgiving, the SOP offered an array of trips including kayak roll sessions, a ropes course, bouldering sessions, a climbing trip, and hiking the entire 20-mile Perimeter Trail, as well as a night hike and night canoeing trips to enjoy the lunar eclipse.

## **Other University News**

**Campus Christmas tree lighting:** The campus Christmas tree lighting will be tomorrow afternoon, Dec. 3, in front of Walsh-Ellett. Everyone is welcome to join the celebration at 4:30 p.m. There will be music, fellowship, and holiday-inspired treats for all!

**Lessons and Carols:** After being unable to gather in person last December, we look forward to welcoming the extended Sewanee family back into All Saints' Chapel again in 2021. This year, expanded seating capacity can accommodate 1,100 people at each service. We expect to be able to seat every person who comes to join us. Two services—Saturday, Dec. 4, at 7 p.m., and Sunday, Dec. 5, at 4 p.m.—will feature walk-up seating, and doors will open an hour in advance of the service. The service at 4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 4, features reserved seating. We have no more reserved seating available for this service. The Saturday 7 p.m. service will be livestreamed for our friends and family who will not be attending in person. Please also note that masks are required, and large bags or backpacks will not be allowed in All Saints' Chapel. [Email](#) if you have questions.

**Sewanee's 27th Rhodes Scholar:** I hope by now you've seen the news that [Klarke Stricklen, C'22](#), is one of only 32 American students chosen as Rhodes Scholars for 2022. Many of you know Klarke from her work with the Roberson Project, the campus chapter of NAACP, or the Wick, as well as for her academic excellence. I know she will represent Sewanee in a stellar way as she continues her studies at Oxford and beyond!

## **COVID-19 Policy Reminder**

**COVID-19 dashboard:** Don't forget about our [COVID-19 dashboard](#). The dashboard, which is updated at least weekly, provides the current rate of vaccination among students, faculty, and staff, and weekly testing results. The dashboard also provides 2021 data on new COVID-19 cases in Franklin, Marion, Grundy, and Coffee counties, as well as a link at the bottom to the CDC's COVID-19 data tracker website.

**Masking policy reminder:** Even though we are mostly vaccinated, please don't forget the [University's masking policy](#). We continue to support indoor masking through our mandate because the [CDC continues to recommend](#) that both [fully vaccinated](#) and [unvaccinated](#) people wear masks indoors when in areas of the country with “substantial” or “high” transmission of COVID-19. Three counties constitute our area of concern and, according to the CDC, [Franklin, Marion, and Grundy counties continue to meet those conditions](#). For the most up-to-date information, check the [University's COVID-19 website](#) and look for email announcements.

If the transmission rate in our area drops into the “moderate” or “low” designation, the University will consider relaxing its masking policy. Because transmission rates are likely to vary over time, it is possible that the masking policy will be updated during the semester. For the most up-to-date information, check the [University's COVID-19 website](#), and look for email announcements.

Take care,

Nancy