

December 9, 2020

Dear Friends,

Spring Planning

We are still keeping an eye on some processes that will indicate the number of college students who intend to participate in their Sewanee education during the spring semester. A total of 1,668 students have registered for at least one course, and 1,621 have at least 12 hours (three courses), a full course load. This latter number is in line with our expectations based on normal retention and attrition. Students can continue to register for classes and modify their class schedules into February.

Residential Life also will be gathering information soon about students returning to campus in January. As we re-establish the bubble, we again will have a staggered return schedule to allow for testing of all students before they re-enter their living spaces. Whereas students were assigned their arrival dates in August, students and families can choose their arrival dates in late January within a defined window of dates. Each student will indicate their preferred arrival date or that they do not intend to return, providing the Residential Life office with important housing needs information and another early count of student participation in the spring. Another indicator of expected student participation will be bill payments. Statements went out last week; payment or nonpayment of room and board fees will indicate whether a student will be on campus or studying remotely.

And then there are several odds and ends that the FOG is working on to prepare generally for the spring. Student Life staff are looking for ways to keep our students engaged, much as they did during the summer. We are considering appropriate and timely communications with students about what to expect in spring, including both reminders and things to look forward to. The fall semester required that we make a lot of policy changes on the fly, so we'll be scrubbing the COVID-19 website to ensure that all interim policies are updated and easily accessible. IT staff are making changes to cabling in some classrooms, and adding and moving some microphones and cameras. They are also reviewing the Wi-Fi capacity and speed.

Here are some interesting tidbits about the academic program in the College: In the fall, 70 students (whether studying on campus or remotely) had a full schedule of courses that were 100% online. For the spring semester, the comparable number so far is 44. In addition, while 37% of sections were 100% online in the fall semester, in the spring only 31% of sections will be fully online. Currently, about 16 students plan to study abroad, half of whom will be studying in their home country.

Winter Break

While the campus has been largely empty for close to three weeks now, students and faculty have still been busy preparing for and taking finals. Exams ended last Friday for School of Theology students and yesterday for College students. Faculty are still grading, but everyone will soon get a well-deserved break.

Although the bubble is open for now, don't forget that the 3W's remain our most powerful tool to combat the spread of COVID-19. As the number of cases continues to rise in our region, please remember to practice the 3W's: [Wear your mask](#). Wash your hands. Watch your distance. It's important to follow good [COVID-19 protocols](#) both on campus *and off campus*, and [to continue to limit your social interactions](#).

Athletics Announcement

Following the Southern Athletic Association Council of Presidents' vote to allow student-athletes who play fall and winter sports to compete in the spring semester, the University announced precautionary measures for its teams with the goal of keeping student-athletes, coaches, and game staff safe while limiting community and campus exposure to COVID-19. [Read more here](#).

Testing

Our Public Health Office has provided [information about COVID-19 testing during the break](#) that I will reiterate here.

- Until the end of January, students residing on campus and select groups of employees who interact regularly with those students will be tested each week.
- Testing services will be provided to employees who are *symptomatic and working on campus*, although results may not be available on the same day. If you are symptomatic, please email publichealth@sewanee.edu to schedule a test.
- Currently, we are not planning to provide general asymptomatic (screening) test services to employees during this period. Employees were asked to volunteer to be tested in order to help our new Sewanee lab prepare for high-volume testing of students in January. Thanks to all who volunteered.

During the week of **Jan. 18–22**, all employees will be tested prior to the majority of student arrivals. This will help ensure everyone is safe and healthy as we re-establish the bubble and begin a new semester. Additional details and information about the testing schedule will be sent to all employees in January.

Other Public Health News

Our public health officials sent out information late last week about a change in the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance on the quarantine period for persons exposed to someone with COVID-19. Find their full communication [here](#). The University is adopting this new protocol for students and employees:

Employees and students may discontinue quarantine seven days after their last exposure to an individual testing positive for COVID-19 if they:

- Continue to participate in contact tracing for an additional seven days;
- Report no symptoms;

- Receive a negative test result after testing on day six or seven of their quarantine, prior to returning to campus.

After ending quarantine, employees and students are still required to:

- Wear a mask, stay at least six feet away from others, wash their hands, avoid crowds, and take other steps to [prevent the spread of COVID-19](#).
- Watch for symptoms until 14 days after exposure.
- Immediately self-isolate if symptoms emerge, and contact publichealth@sewanee.edu.

As I am sure you are aware, COVID-19 vaccines are in the news, with the first doses given to members of the public in the UK yesterday. It does not appear that vaccines will be distributed widely enough to have an effect on our spring semester decisions or activities. We'll wait to see how things develop over the course of the next several months before making any determination about requiring vaccinations for summer or fall.

From My Perspective

I had a great night's sleep on Friday. I mention it because I felt so rested on Saturday that I realized I hadn't felt that good in a very long time. I'm tired of being tired. And I'm worried about everyone's exhaustion. I am deeply grateful that staff will have two full weeks off (thanks to the VC for the two extra paid days off) because a night or two of solid sleep won't be enough to allow us to reboot after the break. It will take more than that to re-energize as an organization. Too many of us have been sprinting through this marathon and we cannot simply pick up the sprint again in January.

The good thing is, I don't think we will need to. Most of the really difficult, weighty decisions and modifications have been made. It feels like we've struck something of a new rhythm, giving us a modicum of predictability, or perhaps just less unpredictability. We can pace ourselves and start to recover as an institution. This is likely to take a while, and we'll need to be patient. We won't all be on the same recovery timetable, and we won't necessarily arrive back at our starting place, where we were before this began. We'll be different individually, and therefore we'll be different as an institution. And that will be OK, even exciting.

Getting through this will still take a while. After all, while the prospect of a vaccine is a light at the end of the tunnel, we don't know how long that tunnel will turn out to be, or exactly where that tunnel will lead us. But I am confident we will get there. We've learned a lot about ourselves and one another. We've seen what can be done when we all pull together. We pulled off an *amazing* feat this semester. It gives me tremendous confidence that we can do absolutely anything.

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost