

January 5, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

Happy New Year! I hope your break was restful and restorative, and that you were able to unplug and unwind with your friends and families. I want to acknowledge those offices that are not able to take the time off that most of the staff take for granted. For instance, the Registrar's Office needs to process grades, course evaluations, and other items related to faculty and students in preparation for the coming semester. Of course we depend on the Sewanee Police Department to stay on duty. Several athletic teams arrived early, which means the Sewanee Molecular Diagnostics Lab was testing athletes, and coaches and trainers were busy as well. In addition to these examples, I'm sure there are other offices that don't fully shut down. I am also grateful that members of the leadership team were responsive to the need to meet last week in order to discuss the pandemic and our protocols for the coming semester. Thank you all!

Thank you as well to Facilities Management staff, SPD, and others who are helping us through this week's weather events. I hope everyone is able to stay safe and warm.

Starting Wage Increase

I am pleased to announce that effective Jan. 1 the University's starting hourly wage has increased by more than 20%, from \$9.75 to \$12. What's more, all of the University's more than 370 hourly non-exempt employees will receive some increase in their hourly rate in order to maintain equity between job classifications. New compensation letters will be sent to all staff members affected by this increase. This is a significant investment (nearly \$750,000 annually) in our most important resource—our people—and I appreciate the efforts by many of you to make this happen. We recognize that this large step forward is not the final step, and the University will continue to examine this topic as budget priorities are considered.

Spring Semester

Many colleges and universities are delaying the start of their spring semesters or are starting with remote instruction. Sewanee will begin classes in the School of Theology on Jan. 10 and in the College on Jan. 11, as scheduled and in person. This means that the campus will soon start to fill up. In [emails sent to them on Monday](#), we've asked all students to get a vaccine booster shot as soon as they are eligible, and to take a COVID-19 test 24 to 72 hours prior to returning to campus. Students are to delay their return if they test positive and work with their faculty to arrange to keep up with their classes. The [University's masking policy](#) will remain in effect this semester.

As mentioned above, the leadership team met and communicated throughout last week, consulting with student leaders, board members, and with both [Dr. Paul Erwin, C'79](#), and [Dr. Walter Merrill, C'70](#), to benefit from their insights. Everyone acknowledges that we are very

likely to see a temporary spike in breakthrough COVID-19 cases on campus as we come back together, similar to the spike we saw early in the fall semester. While case counts may be higher than they have been and this may cause some disruption in our operations, the severity of cases of the omicron variant appears to be low, especially for those who are fully vaccinated and have received a booster.

Given the high transmission rate of the omicron variant, we have an additional strategy in place to start the spring semester. We have received enough rapid tests from the Tennessee Department of Health for each student to take a test a couple of days after their arrival. These rapid tests are Bluetooth-enabled, which means the results will automatically be reported to the state, and the state will do any contact tracing and follow up in the case of positive test results. We are also asking students to report any positive test results to University Health Service (UHS), since the state will not report them back to us. We'll provide a category on the dashboard for these self-reported rapid test results during the first week of classes. UHS will continue to provide COVID-19 testing for symptomatic students or students who have been a close contact of someone diagnosed with COVID-19. As in the fall, students who test positive after arrival will be advised to isolate in place if they cannot return home; we are offering KN95 masks to students isolating in their rooms and to their roommates.

COVID-19 Updates

Boosters: The University strongly encourages all eligible students, faculty, and staff to receive a COVID-19 vaccination booster shot as soon as possible. [Recent studies in the U.K.](#) indicate that booster shots prove 80% to 85% effective against the omicron variant and 95% effective against delta; boosters also reduce the severity of COVID among those infected. In addition, the CDC has [announced that those who have received boosters do not need to quarantine](#) after an exposure to COVID-19. This will greatly simplify our management of COVID-19 on campus for all who are boosted. An on-campus booster clinic is scheduled for Jan. 17. More information will be forthcoming.

You are encouraged to voluntarily report your booster record in [our database](#). This is a HIPAA-compliant survey that requires the date you completed your vaccination series, Banner ID, and a photo of your CDC-issued vaccination record card. Knowing the number of our campus community members who have received their booster shots will help us to understand the risk level within our campus community and inform our decisions moving forward.

Testing: I am sure a number of you have questions about your ability to receive a COVID-19 test through University resources. The supply of rapid tests the Department of Health supplied to UHS is specifically for students, and the University has not otherwise procured a supply of rapid tests, which are in short supply across the country. The Sewanee Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory (SMDL) has made progress in being able to extend its services more generally. SMDL is now able to bill Medicare and Medicaid, and with the extension of the CARES Act, we may bill insurance companies. However, we may only bill insurance companies for tests ordered by a personal physician for persons who have COVID symptoms or who have been exposed to persons known to have COVID. Thus, we cannot charge insurance companies for surveillance testing. But, as was the case last semester, the SMDL can perform surveillance tests with direct pay if the test is ordered by the employee's personal physician.

Masks and personal protective equipment: While we are learning to live with some presence of COVID-19 on campus, I want to acknowledge those with family members who cannot be vaccinated and/or who might be more susceptible to illness due to other health factors. We know that you do not want to take the virus home. Knowing that we are likely to have an increase in the highly transmissible omicron variant on campus this month, we are stocking up on [KN95 masks](#). Employees who would like a supply of masks or other personal protective equipment (PPE) for work should contact the Purchasing Office (purchasing@sewanee.edu).

The Purchasing Office will place orders for additional required PPE not in stock so that the University can obtain discounts and lower prices. All requests for masks (medical, KN95, or N95), hand sanitizer, gloves, face shields, wipes, sneeze guards, and other PPE should be emailed to purchasing@sewanee.edu. Please list the requesting department or individual, the requested item, and the desired quantity in the email. The Purchasing Office will place the orders by next Monday, Jan. 10. If you have any questions related to purchasing, please send them to the above email or refer to the University [Purchasing Policy](#).

I appreciate all of you for everything you are doing. We are going through some uncertain times yet again. Uncertainty seems to be a feature of our lives these days. I am grateful to be part of this caring and supportive community.

Sincerely,

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