



February 1, 2021

To: Wabash Community
From: President Scott Feller and Dr. Ann Taylor
Re: Community Update – Week 2

Congratulations on completing the first week of classes and labs, and a special shout-out to the volleyball and basketball teams, who competed over the weekend in the first home athletic events since March 7, 2020! Things will pick up speed here at Wabash, and we hope you are adjusting and adapting to the increased pace after a restorative break.

Last week we shared preliminary results from the CVS Return Ready testing: the final positivity rate was 3.2%. The positivity rate from last week's on-campus surveillance testing was 0.8%. As we expected, pre-return testing reduced but did not eliminate COVID-19 on campus. This illustrates that mitigation tactics work yet no single approach is perfect. The same could be said of masking, symptom monitoring, distancing, hygiene, and quarantine/isolation. While it is frustrating that every tool we have is imperfect, we must remember that the combination of approaches, working together, keeps us healthy.

We face a related challenge in identifying a single metric that accurately describes the state of COVID-19 on campus. The color code system we announced last week (and will implement next week) will be based on a combination of factors. The positivity rate from surveillance testing will be weighted most heavily, but the distribution of cases will also play a role, e.g., cases dispersed across campus are more concerning than those isolated to a particular living unit or team. Community spread in Montgomery County will be taken into account through the risk level assigned by the ISDH (currently red). These are lagging indicators, which means they tell us how conditions were the previous week. So, we will also use metrics that predict future disease prevalence, such as COVID Pass completion percentage and observational studies of mask wearing as insight into adherence to public health practices.

News coverage over the past week has emphasized concerns about new strains of COVID-19, including possibilities of greater infectivity, reduced vaccine effectiveness, and challenges in monitoring the prevalence of variants. The most effective way to guard against variant strains is to double down on the tactics we have been using all year, especially masking and distancing. We have confirmed with our providers that our testing program should not be compromised by variants. The good news is that our antigen tests target a protein not associated with currently observed mutations, and our PCR tests target multiple genes, only one of which is believed to be affected by the mutations. We will continue to benefit from the Indiana State Department of Health's program to conduct genetic sequencing of hundreds of samples each week from across the state in search of variant strains. We are also fortunate that the core business of our PCR test provider is genetic sequencing of tumor cells, and they are using that expertise to sequence suspect samples.



Perhaps the most contagious thing on campus is attitude. Do you complain about and criticize people doing what needs to be done to be on campus this semester or do you thank them? Both happened to members of our staff this week, and the effects, both good and bad, have an impact on our ability to live and learn together as a residential community. Part of “living humanely” is recognizing other people’s talents, issues, and challenges and then doing what you can to build others up. It’s easy to focus on what we don’t have, but celebrating what we have accomplished will continue to strengthen our bond.

As [Mayflower Coffee Shop](#) used to promote as its motto, “As you ramble on through life, brother, Whatever be your goal, Keep your eye upon the doughnut, And not upon the hole.”

#WabashTogether!

With gratitude for you and all you bring to campus

President Scott Feller

Ann Taylor, Special Assistant to the President for COVID Response and Planning