

# Wabash.

August 24, 2020

To: Wabash College Community  
From: President Scott Feller and Professor Ann Taylor  
Re: Wabash Community Update: Week Three

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We want to begin with a thank you to the entire community for the effort invested in our first full week of residential education last week. We have seen individual students, staff, and faculty modeling what it means to be liberal arts learners by applying skills and knowledge from one area to solve very different problems in another. We especially want to thank Cassie Busch, Brad Weaver, and David Dalenberg who developed the technology we needed in the Student Health Center to facilitate our surveillance testing program. Thanks also to the students chosen for testing, 100% of whom showed up on time. We greatly appreciate Nurse Chris Amidon and our amazing athletic trainers, who are staffing the normal Student Health Center operations as well as our symptomatic and surveillance testing programs. Everything that we can do to support their work contributes to our ability to operate as a residential college.

We have two pieces of positive news to report from our surveillance testing. First, the large batch of samples collected and submitted on Friday showed a positivity rate of 1.25%. While this is lower than our return-to-campus results, it is important to note that this decrease is not significant in a statistical sense. Second, we have begun to observe shorter turnaround time for COVID-19 tests – roughly two days compared to the five or six days we experienced previously. Nevertheless, we continue to work to add the capability to run rapid tests (15 minute) in the Student Health Center. We signed an agreement late last week with a company that will provide us necessary reagents and test kits, though these remain in limited supply and subject to Department of Health and Human Services guidelines on distribution. We emphasize again that the symptom monitoring app will most likely identify more COVID disease than testing can. Student symptom and temperature reporting increased to over 90% last week, another bit of positive news.

Last week brought several less positive reports from other colleges and universities struggling to manage COVID-19 on their campuses. While different schools will each face unique challenges and the failure (or success) of any other campus does not determine our path, we are well served to learn as much as possible from the experiences of others. Initial reports are consistent with the observation we shared last week that the greatest challenge that we face is maintaining healthy practices in the unstructured time outside of classes. We encourage everyone – students, faculty, and staff – to think creatively about the ways that we can maintain a rich student life program in these unusual times. We must redouble our efforts to support students while pushing them to be their best. And it is important that we hold each other to high standards without resorting to shaming; the history of public health campaigns has shown this to be an ineffective tactic.

We are also writing to share new guidance from public health authorities on what constitutes “close contact.” The CDC definition of less than six feet for more than 15 minutes is somewhat ambiguous about how the time is defined. The Indiana State Department of Health has now communicated its interpretation: 15 minutes of close contact during the period from two days prior to the positive person’s onset of symptoms or positive test date until the time the person enters isolation. This is a stricter, cumulative definition that could lead to more individuals leaving campus for quarantine, but we are committed to following the guidance of our public health agencies and thus will be using this definition going forward. This is a reminder that we must maintain our distance if we are to stay together.

We both pride ourselves on being undaunted by this challenge – at least most days – and our sense is that while reports from other campuses last week were sobering, many of us here at Wabash used that news as motivation to press forward with even greater determination. We are heartened by the response of students and student leaders who have stepped up to find ways to stay connected while remaining physically distanced, and to avoid the types of behaviors that might lead to conditions that would require us to shift to fully remote learning and/or sending students home. While we remain optimistic, we must all keep at the forefront of our minds two facts: (1) COVID-19 is on campus and will continue to be, and (2) success is not guaranteed. We must remain vigilant and committed to keeping each other healthy.

This semester is a marathon, not a sprint. While we have started strong, it is important to focus on the behaviors and attitudes that will allow us to finish strong, too. Now we must find a sustainable pace, one in which we balance work, relationships, and self-care – while maintaining the good behaviors we’ve established of mask wearing and physical distancing. Students, if you need help developing a schedule that allows you to balance work, fun, and sleep, please make an appointment with Zachery Koppelman in the [Office of Student Enrichment](#). Remember that [counseling services](#) are available, and that Supplemental Instruction and the Quantitative Skills and Writing Centers are up and running. And everything – academics, physical health, and mental health – are better with a good night’s sleep. Please prioritize rest, exercise, and healthy eating.

This is how we fight: with healthy habits, concern for each other, and conviction that we are better together.

Make it another great week, Wabash!

President Scott Feller

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