



September 28, 2020

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

Tomorrow will be the midpoint of our fall semester in residence, reminding us that we have accomplished so much since students returned in early August. While at times we have struggled, we have learned valuable lessons that seem to be paying off and that will guide us as we plan for the spring semester. Over the next two weeks, the Healthy Campus Task Force will address important aspects of spring planning such as re-entry protocols, while the faculty develops a plan for senior comprehensive exams.

Many news stories over the past two months have focused on the challenges of providing a safe and healthy campus environment. Recently, we have begun to read more stories of colleges and universities that are finding ways to succeed in these difficult times. Common themes of the success stories include good planning, surveillance testing, campus unity toward a common goal, being located in a community with low COVID prevalence, and a little good luck. We are fortunate to have these factors in our favor. Here in Montgomery County, the seven-day average of COVID-19 cases is just five per 100,000 people; the state and national averages are approximately 12 and 13, respectively.

We are pleased again this week to report 100% negative test results from both surveillance testing of random students and from symptomatic students seen at the Health Center. We also received our first results from wastewater testing in select living units, which were negative. We consider the effluent testing an experiment at this point, and are grateful to the city and state governments that are underwriting the costs of wastewater testing over the next six weeks.

These encouraging signs suggest that the hard work our community is engaged in is paying off, but we must caution against misreading this as proof we have eliminated or even reduced our community spread. It is important that we don't become over-confident or back off from our practices of wearing masks, watching our distance, and washing our hands.

We have had two weeks with no positive cases, but we do not have sufficient data to claim that the infection rate is lower than 2%, which was our original assumption. To put it in terms of scientific evidence, this data might be encouraging enough to submit as preliminary data for a grant proposal, but it certainly would not be considered the solid evidence needed to publish in a peer reviewed journal. However, it is allowing us to move forward with additional carefully planned social activities, and begin discussions with student leaders about developing stages of increased visitation to campus.



As we have said repeatedly, this semester is a marathon, not a sprint. The adrenaline that got us through the early weeks is wearing off, and we need to find sustainable strategies for renewal and connecting with others. We are all dealing with an [ambiguous loss](#) of our normal connections, routines, sense of control, trust of others, and even our self-care routines. Play and creative activities can be restorative, so find time this week to create something new or do something purely for enjoyment. Reach out to a friend, either close by or across the planet, just to check in and say hello.

Finally, it is imperative that everyone in our community gets a flu shot. Our next clinic is this Thursday, October 1 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in Knowling Fieldhouse.

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