



October 19, 2020

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

At the end of the day we will have completed 70% of class days for this extraordinary semester. We are at a point where we must simultaneously remain focused on the present with strict adherence to our COVID-19 mitigation tactics, while planning for the spring semester. Last week we made announcements related to comprehensive exams, the spring calendar, and athletics, and there was likely something to disappoint each of you in those memos. We understand and accept that we are often in the position of choosing among paths nobody wants to take, but our philosophy aligns in many ways with a recent [Atlantic article](#) that calls for approaches that are empirical, imperfect, and just enough.

This was our first week in almost a month with a substantial number of positive test results among asymptomatic students in the surveillance testing. Our Tuesday sample had a positivity rate of 6.2% and two living units had two positive cases each. While this was concerning, the lack of any positive tests from wastewater or symptomatic individuals, and the identification of a tentative link between the two living units, suggested the possibility of localized transmission. Therefore, on Thursday and Friday afternoons, we conducted targeted surveillance testing of all students in those two living units.

All test results from the smaller living unit came back negative. While not all results have arrived for the second, several students tested positive. We are isolating positive students and quarantining their close contacts, and it is possible that the entire unit will remain in quarantine. Putting students who have tested negative into quarantine is a necessary precaution for several reasons. For a positive test to occur, there needs to be a sufficient viral load in the nasal passages, which might not happen early in an infection. There is also the possibility of false negatives, and with the high rate of asymptomatic cases in this age range, it is important that we stop the transmission chain before it spreads to other living units.

While we like to think of our campus as a bubble, we are most likely being affected by surging rates of COVID-19 in Indiana. The state is setting records for daily cases and hospitalizations. It is a reminder that we are a part of the larger culture, and the importance of practicing good public health behaviors both on and off campus.

The Tuesday round of testing placed approximately 20 students into quarantine and last night's results will likely lead to several dozen more. We need to emphasize in the strongest terms the importance of maintaining your physical distance. One student had eight close contacts; a few instances like that could overwhelm our capacity and send everyone home for the remainder of the semester.



We have asked you to take your physical temperature every day. This symptom monitoring helps catch illnesses at the beginning. Similarly, please take your [mental temperature](#) daily too. Just like for physical health, early intervention is helpful and can prevent long term mental health issues. It is important to acknowledge that all emotions are ok, and allowing yourself to fully experience them is important. Taking care of yourself physically, such as getting enough sleep and physical exercise, can also help your mental health.

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

