



November 2, 2020

To: Wabash Community  
From: President Scott Feller and Dr. Ann Taylor  
Re: Community Update: Week 13

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In normal times, the academic year has a familiar rhythm to it, which certainly hasn't been the case this semester. We are all feeling the effects of no fall break, and the notion of finishing finals before Thanksgiving is strange. Furthermore, the pace of change involved in our management of COVID-19 is much faster than typical academic decision making, leaving many people feeling unsettled. A good example is our message in the middle of last week, which may have been jarring to some. However, quick and decisive quarantining of groups of students has been a key component to our COVID mitigation work this semester – perhaps **the** key component.

Today we report on another rapid change in our campus COVID outlook, but it's good news this time. Last Tuesday's random sample of over 100 asymptomatic individuals resulted in a 0.9% positivity rate, our lowest in three weeks. Combined with zero positive tests from symptomatic students, it appears that our work to isolate the cluster reported last week was successful. We are grateful to our students, who have stepped up to the challenges of mask wearing, physical distancing, avoiding crowded and confined spaces, and most of all have been honest in contact tracing. It is impressive that while the rates of COVID-19 infection in the county, state, and country are sky-rocketing, our students have done the difficult work to bring down our rates. Diligence and responsible behavior have given us a chance to complete the semester in residence – thank you.

We continue to learn a tremendous amount about how to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 on campus. For example, by studying the outbreaks we have had in different living units, we learned both about the effectiveness of contact tracing and maintaining proper distancing. In three separate instances we experienced clusters of cases (6+) in a single living unit. The residents sheltered in place until they were tested, their results were back, and contact tracing was complete. This is key in containing the spread. After isolating positive cases and quarantining their close contacts, we were left with a fraction of the occupants who we also placed into quarantine based on presumptive exposure in the living unit. Our observation to date shows that while a substantial fraction of the close contact quarantine students tested positive, 100% of those quarantined for presumptive exposure remained COVID free. This is an important example that it is possible to avoid contracting the disease by wearing a mask and maintaining distance, even when sharing facilities with infected individuals.

Our current plan is to use time between the semesters to review a number of such experiences with staff and faculty across campus in order to compile a report on lessons learned, update our mitigation tactics, and make procedural changes for the spring semester. We continue to investigate other ways to improve and streamline our COVID operations. If you have suggestions, please submit them to [covid@wabash.edu](mailto:covid@wabash.edu).



We have tried to use these weekly updates to share both what is on our minds and in our hearts. We have received many encouraging replies directed to the campus and to us individually, including one person who shared this quote from Catholic Priest Henri Nouwen:

“Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face?  
Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment?  
Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions.  
I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow will bear many fruits,  
here in this world and the life to come.”

As we begin a week that will combine a contentious election with the challenges we have faced all semester, these are good questions for all of us to consider.

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

