



August 25, 2021

To the Wabash Community,

Today we officially begin the fall semester and I sense both excitement and optimism. Never again will we take for granted things like watching whole families move our new students into their residences for the first time or a football scrimmage against another college or coming together for the Teaching and Learning Committee opening workshop. These were among so many things we were unable to do last year. We can look forward – carefully – to a semester that is far more traditional than a year ago.

I had the good fortune on Monday morning to run into Coach Morgan, who gave me a quick pep talk and reminded me of the countless ways we are better off than a year ago. While universal vaccination is at the top of that list, it is good to remember that the list is very long. To give just one example, the number of COVID-19 tests we could do a year ago was a small fraction of what we can routinely do today, and we waited 3-4 days for results instead of 15 minutes!

Still, the Delta variant of COVID-19 continues to spread in our county and in many areas of our nation. All of us need to be extra vigilant in doing our part to keep Delta at bay, which includes in the near-term masking while in classes and labs and in any indoor spaces off campus. (And, of course, you should feel free to wear a mask anytime, anywhere if it makes you more comfortable.)

A year ago, our task was to reconfigure Wabash to operate safely under pandemic conditions while we waited for vaccines to be developed, tested, and distributed. Today we face a different challenge with COVID – to navigate the path from a pandemic to endemic virus – and while this will be very different work, it will again require each of us to act responsibly to protect the health of others and creatively to fulfill our mission as a residential college.

That long list of ways that we are better off than a year ago includes the many things we learned to #BashCOVID. For example, begin each day with a personal health assessment. If you wake up with a sore throat, congestion, or abnormal headache, take your temperature and, if necessary, students should contact the Student Health Center immediately and employees should stay home from work.

It should be second nature at this point to be attentive to our health, to practice good hand hygiene, and to move activities and events outside when possible. The path out of the pandemic involves using what we learned last year to navigate the uncertainty that will be with us for the foreseeable future. The Healthy Campus Task Force and CARE Team will help us again this year, but we will necessarily rely less on directives from above and more on creativity and adaptation across the College.

Last year, Professor Taylor and I wrote the community at least once a week. While clear and transparent communication will continue this year, you should expect to hear from me less frequently. My hope is to use my communications to educate the community – to provide you the best information possible to use in the myriad risk/benefit analyses that we will face individually and collectively.



Perhaps even more important than what we learned about COVID, we also learned many things about ourselves last year – that we are agile and able to shift gears quickly and that we are resourceful and resilient. Understanding the true meaning of Wabash Always Fights was an important, if often exhausting, lesson for all of us. It is my hope that over the coming weeks we are applying that WAF mentality less to the pandemic and more to finishing an essay, or grading a pile of lab reports, or learning the longest school fight song in the country.

Best wishes for an exciting fall semester,

Scott Feller
President

