



January 10, 2021

To: The Wabash Community
From: President Scott Feller
Re: Updated Guidelines for Quarantine and Isolation

We are one week from the beginning of classes and while the Omicron wave continues to rise, we are simultaneously adapting to the challenges it brings. We continue to develop plans and contingencies based on the evolving trajectory of COVID-19, but especially based on guidance from the CDC, IDoH, and NCAA that has come in the form of updates nearly every day over the past two weeks. Tomorrow, Nurse Amidon and I will join a meeting with Indiana State Health Commissioner Dr. Katrina Box to get some clarity on these rapidly changing and sometimes conflicting communications.

We are also learning from our campus experience with limited operations last week, e.g., senior written comps in seven departments, organized athletic activities by four teams, and professional immersion programs – as well as from the experience of peer residential colleges that began classes a week ago. I was one of six GLCA college presidents who met on Thursday to discuss experiences to date and plans for the immediate future. Reflecting national trends – *Inside Higher Ed* reported last week that [90% of colleges and universities are not changing the start date or mode of instruction](#) for the spring semester – my colleagues shared the view that while we will face disruptions in the coming weeks, the combination of a universally vaccinated campus with widespread availability of booster doses and highly effective N95 masks (none of which we had a year ago) place us in a situation fundamentally different from previous periods of the pandemic.

Please take a moment right now to review this [table with updated campus guidelines for quarantine and isolation](#). While I anticipate that we will announce additional changes in COVID-19 protocols later this week and in the coming weeks, one thing we can begin to address immediately is the emotional health of our community. There is no doubt that we will face operational disruptions and it is important that we remind ourselves to offer grace to those around us. For example, one of our responsibilities will be to isolate when infected and potentially to quarantine when exposed. In a tightly connected community such as ours, this will cause disruptions that inconvenience or disappoint others.

We need to make sure that we offer care and support to members of our community who are infected by COVID or whose studies or work are disrupted by quarantine. I recently read accounts from infected individuals who – upon sharing the news with friends and family – only heard questions such as, “How did you get it?” “Were you wearing a mask?” “Are you boosted?” Here at Wabash, we need to change that and instead ask, “How are you feeling?” “Is there anything I can do to help?” Shaming is not an effective public health strategy.



We also need to offer grace to ourselves. A conversation with a campus colleague last week reminded me of a recent [Washington Post article](#) on the inappropriate guilt experienced by many who have become infected in this Omicron wave. “It’s eye-opening that I feel so much shame from it. I’m realizing how much judgment I was secretly harboring against people who got it before.”

I realize that it is difficult to think of others while each of us is working to understand the [impact Omicron is having on our own health](#). While our protection from vaccination and from prior infection are reduced against Omicron, the added protection from a booster shot likely makes up for the partial vaccine evasion. The way that I have been thinking about this is that I am less likely to be seriously ill from an Omicron infection today ([several weeks post-booster](#)) than I was from a Delta infection throughout the fall (when I was not eligible for a booster). That is very good news.

The bad news is that even with the enhanced protection provided by vaccine boosters, higher infection rates bring greater risk because of a greater probability of being exposed. Thankfully, we can also make up for this effect by upping our masking game by switching to N95 or KN95 masks to reduce the probability that we will be exposed to an infectious dose of virus particles.

I will close by sharing [an accessible review](#) of the latest science on Omicron by Dr. Eric Topol, Director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, and by repeating the helpful reminder from public health expert Dr. Joseph Allen that I shared last week: “If you’re vaccinated, and boosted, and wearing an N95, that’s as low risk as anything in your life, *regardless of what anyone around you is doing.*”