



March 11, 2020

To: Wabash College Community  
From: President Gregory D. Hess  
Re: Wabash College Response to COVID-19

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In the days since the community gathered in the Chapel to hear about best practices for combatting the coronavirus, of potential disruptions to College operations, and on how we are each responsible for the health of our community, the virus has continued to spread. There are now confirmed cases of COVID-19 in most states, including several in Indiana.

Our work to plan for the arrival of coronavirus has also continued, guided by our commitment to minimize health risks for the community and to minimize disruption to the student experience. We have made difficult decisions, such as canceling immersion trips to Italy and China, using an approach that integrates the guidance of public health agencies at the local, state, and national levels with the expertise of our campus health professionals.

At the beginning of the week I appointed a crisis management group, comprising Deans Scott Feller and Greg Redding and CFO Kendra Cooks, to work with offices across campus and to make recommendations at key decision points. They meet daily and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, allowing the College to respond quickly to the range of issues that continue to arise. Dean Feller and the Division Chairs are working with faculty and IT Services to develop alternative course delivery formats, primarily online approaches utilizing the Canvas system. Many faculty members used the spring break to further explore this technology and adapt syllabi for their courses, work that will continue. The entire College is working hard to continue to provide our students an exceptional education on campus, while simultaneously preparing for a situation where students would be sent home to continue their coursework from a distance.

The consensus of public health experts is that the coronavirus will be spread in communities across the nation. This reality has driven some colleges and universities to close their campuses, send students back to their homes, and continue academic programming online, sometimes for the week preceding or following spring break, and in other cases for the remainder of the spring semester. These were undoubtedly careful decisions arrived at based on the unique circumstances of each institution. But we must make the decisions for Wabash based on the particular risks we face and the tools we have to mitigate those risks.

Our current assessment is that the best path for Wabash is to continue to operate as a residential college, though with a number of changes to our normal practices. The actions we will take are directed toward reducing the spread of the virus through excellent personal hygiene and sanitization, reducing the total number of people on campus (through tele-commuting and restricting visitors), limiting gatherings of individuals in classes and events, encouraging everyone to honor greater than usual personal space, and isolating individuals with symptoms consistent with coronavirus. This approach toward reducing the number of cases takes into account the latest guidance from public health officials, and we believe that Wabash is the type of community that can commit to necessary behavioral changes.



We realize that some students will not be comfortable returning to campus, especially those who have health conditions that place them at greater risk from infection. Other students, who become ill, are known to have been exposed, or who test positive for the virus, may be sent home to recover if possible, or we will assist them with self-quarantine on campus. Faculty will work with these students on an individual basis, to the fullest extent possible, to provide alternative learning opportunities so that they may continue their coursework.

Patience will be required, especially in the next two weeks. Our College has spent nearly 200 years developing an unparalleled educational experience based on close student-faculty interactions. To implement new delivery systems that are so different than the interactions we presently use will be challenging. But we will rise to that challenge. There will be numerous changes outside our classrooms as well. In the coming days you will hear more about these, either directly from me or from the crisis management team. These include:

- Cancellation of many gatherings on campus that bring large numbers of people together. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, weighing any health risks against the value of the learning opportunity.
- Closure or reduction in hours of certain facilities and offices around campus, especially those where services can be provided online or over the phone. Some employees will be working from home, and we will all need to adjust to a system with less face-to-face contact.
- Reducing access to campus for individuals who are not students, employees, or invited guests of the College. For example, emeritus faculty should not come to campus and employees should not bring members of their families to campus. While we greatly appreciate the contributions they make to Wabash, alumni, parents, and friends of students should meet students off campus.
- Supplemental cleaning for all campus buildings, including residence halls and fraternities.

These moves are designed to meet two objectives. First, they reduce the population density on our campus and the number of person-to-person interactions, important elements in our strategy to flatten the curve. Second, they reduce the stress on campus resources and allow those to be redeployed for critical need. Every hour that our campus services team can save by not setting up and tearing down events can be invested in the enhanced cleaning program that we are implementing in campus buildings and common spaces in living units.

Finally, as you prepare yourself for these changes, also prepare for additional disruptions. This is a rapidly evolving situation and we may, on short notice, make additional changes to operations. This could include suspending residential education though that remains our least-favored option.

I again ask for your vigilance in doing your part to safeguard the health of our community and to be patient as we monitor the situation and make decisions that are in the best in interest of our students, faculty, and staff.