

February 2, 2021

Subj: Spring Update #3

Dear Colleagues:

The days are getting noticeably longer here in northern Indiana as we kick off the spring semester this week. Even as we look forward to brighter, warmer days ahead, we hope all of you enjoyed the snow and sunshine these past few days.

We start this message with thanks to all those responsible for the smooth student move-in, pre-matriculation testing, and other student-focused services. A special shout-out to those at the testing facility and in labs supporting the testing, as well as those in Building Services, the residence halls, OIT, Student Affairs, and Campus Dining – all of whom spent a snowy weekend welcoming students back to campus. We are grateful. Here is a brief update.

Pre-matriculation testing

By the time classes start tomorrow, we will have completed pre-matriculation testing for more than 7,523 undergraduate and professional students, of whom 40 tested positive for the virus and are now isolated from others. We will continue to test students who arrive late as soon as we welcome them to campus. While we are encouraged by the positivity rate of roughly 0.5%, we are mindful that the real test in keeping the number of cases low lies ahead as we resume classes and related campus activities in the coming weeks.

Concerns about new virus strains

Like many of you, we continue to closely follow news about new strains of the COVID-19 virus to assess their potential impacts on our campus health and safety protocols. While the new, more transmissible strains are concerning, the mechanism for transmission of these variants is unchanged and thus our public health protocols remain the bedrock of our response. Consistently wearing a properly fitting mask when around others, maintaining physical distance from others, and washing hands frequently are important as ever. We also note that our existing testing infrastructure will pick up positive cases, regardless of the variant someone might have.

Should we be double-masking?

Recently, a number of articles have appeared in print and online recommending that people wear two masks, one over the other, as added protection against new, more transmissible variants of the COVID-19 virus. Our expert faculty members, Mark McCreedy and David Leighton, who have done some initial experimental work, explain that the risks come from both inhalation through the mask (Is my mask protecting me?) and exhalation bypass through gaps in how masks fit our faces (Is my mask protecting others?). Double-masking may offer some additional protection, but only if the second mask is chosen to block any gaps that occur around the first. Otherwise the amount of unfiltered air leaking around the mask will go up, increasing risk to others without providing additional benefit to the wearer.

Each of you should have received three new cloth masks to start the spring semester. If for some reason you did not receive them, please contact your department. Additionally, a supply of disposable masks is being distributed across campus. If you have questions, please call the Hotline at 574-634-HERE or email covidresponseunit@nd.edu, and they will be happy to connect you with your department contact.

Enhanced OIT tool: isolation, quarantine, and red passes

Our colleagues in OIT recently launched a new version of the [online tool](#) that informs instructors which of their students may be in quarantine or isolation on any given class day. The revised tool additionally tells instructors which of their students received a red pass on their daily health checks, reducing uncertainty about who instructors can reasonably expect to attend class on any given day. Thanks to OIT for their continued outstanding support in these challenging times.

Keeping *Calm* in stressful times

With generous support from two of the University's advisory councils, Notre Dame acted on a student recommendation to purchase an institution-wide subscription to the [Calm](#) sleep, meditation, and relaxation mobile app, which will soon be available to all who attend or work at Notre Dame. The app is one of many tools and methods we hope will lessen student, faculty, and staff member stress and promote health and well-being this spring. Additional information and details on how to sign up for the Calm app will be provided later this week.

Enhanced outdoor student dining and gathering spaces

Over the winter break, several new temporary heated structures were put in place around campus, significantly expanding space for outdoor student dining and socializing—you might call it our attempt to keep dining *al fresco* from becoming dining “al freezeo.” We are hopeful these spaces will make the winter months healthier and more enjoyable for students until the Library and South Lawn outdoor recreation spaces resume operations in April. Additional plans are in the works for outdoor winter recreation and activities, with more information coming soon.

COVID-19 vaccinations

We continue to closely monitor news about vaccine developments and vaccination programs that affect our campus and community. All vaccines currently being administered underwent rigorous safety testing and have proven to be highly effective against the virus. Yesterday the Indiana Department of Health announced that people age 65 and older are now eligible to receive the vaccine. We urge all Notre Dame community members to get vaccinated as soon as they become eligible for their own protection and the safety of our entire community.

Acknowledging Black History and Experience

Though February traditionally provides a focal point to honor and recognize the contributions of Black Americans to our society, our aim at Notre Dame is to promote understanding, equality, humanity, and social justice each and every day. The pandemic's disproportionate impact on communities of color coincides with calls for racial and social justice across the nation. This calls each of us to consider the experience of others and learn together as a community. Here is a link to some of the Black History Month [events](#) offered across our campus community. Plans are being finalized for [Walk the Walk Week](#) from February 22-28. Please keep an eye out for additional information and look for other opportunities to help us build a more inclusive and welcoming Notre Dame.

Closing thoughts

Even with the many challenges that lie ahead, we have reason for optimism. To put a smile on your face, we bring you Ultimate Optimist Sophia, whose father is Matt Rassi, a data specialist in the Enrollment Division, and whose Nana is Candy Rassi, associate director in the Office of Student Accounts. We all wish we could rock a bow as well as Sophia!

We are exceedingly grateful for your considerable efforts to get us this far, and we wish you all a very successful spring semester.

Please remember:

- Wear your mask
- Practice physical distancing
- Wash your hands frequently
- Complete your daily health check
- Keep your scheduled testing appointments

Please be kind and generous to yourself and others.

Yours in Notre Dame,

Marie Lynn Miranda, Provost
Shannon Cullinan, Executive Vice President

