

BELHAVEN UNIVERSITY

O u r S t a n d a r d i s C h r i s t

To: Traditional Students
From: Dr. Roger Parrott, President
Re: Required Covid-19 Testing for the Spring Semester

Wednesday, December 16, 2020

Dear Belhaven Students,

We made it through a challenging semester - thanks to your diligent effort and the Herculean effort of our faculty, and our staff. We only have one more tough semester to go, and then, hopefully the world will start a return to normal as the vaccine lessens the impact of Covid-19.

As a campus, we did very well with Covid-19 cases until about the first of November when an outbreak infected a number of students and staff. That outbreak caused a large number of students to be quarantined – some having their second or third quarantine of the semester.

During the fall semester, 113 students and employees tested positive for the virus, which is about 9% of those who are engaged in our traditional daytime campus.

In a zoom meeting I had last week with college leaders, Dr. Deborah Birx, White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator, reported that during the fall semester, college campuses that did not conduct weekly campus-wide COVID-19 surveillance testing saw on average a 15% infection rate, while college campuses that conducted weekly testing had less than 1% infection rate.

For our campus, we need to add testing to our protection plan to the virus control the spread of infections and dramatically reduce the number of students and employees who must quarantine.

We are preparing to test EVERY student, faculty member, and staff member at least once a week, with athletes and performing arts majors being tested even more often.

This is great news, controlling the virus spreading through spring semester has significant personal and campus benefits for each one of us:

- Student quarantines could be dramatically decreased
- Athletic teams will have the best opportunity to play their full schedules
- Arts performances will be able to have limited live audiences
- Most importantly, you will be helping to keep students, faculty and staff, and your family safe.

College students often do not show COVID-19 symptoms and tend to be asymptomatic (not show any signs or symptoms of the virus) and therefore, they have been identified as “silent spreaders.” Testing everyone weekly is the most effective way to control the epidemic on our campus.

I am thrilled to welcome to Belhaven Dr. Shelley Smith, who began work with us December 1st as Assistant to the President for Coronavirus Management. She is working directly with me on this project because for our campus, there is no higher priority than keeping everyone safe. With her expertise, and that of our science faculty, we can conduct all the testing in-house with the new laboratory equipment provided through a government grant.

Dr. Smith earned her Ph.D. in theoretical and quantum chemistry, and most recently was Research & Insights Technical Development Manager, for Ergon, Inc. She taught at Mississippi College for many years and has a great heart and passion for students and campus life. She will be responsible for the entire testing and contact tracing program, working with our team who has done such a magnificent job with managing Covid-19 tracing and testing this fall.

Over the break Dr. Smith will be developing a video that will guide us through the testing and tracing process and give us direction for how we can keep each other safe.

How will the required Covid-19 testing work?

1. Testing will be required of all students, faculty, and staff who attend daytime classes or work in campus buildings. **TESTING IS NOT OPTIONAL.** If you are enrolled this spring as a traditional student attending classes on campus, you must be tested on schedule – probably once a week, but you may be more than once each week.
2. We have made testing extremely convenient. A temporary building has been constructed between the library and Fitzhugh, so you will not even need to leave campus to be tested.
3. The test is fast, easy, and painless – it is a saliva test, not a nasal test. No one even touches you. It is a new, hassle-free, anxiety-free, and fast way of providing a sample for testing.
4. When you arrive at the testing center you will: (a) answer a few questions to assure you do not have COVID-19 symptoms, (b) have your ID scanned, (c) take the bar-coded test tube from the attendant, and (d) do the test yourself. That is it – you will be in and out of the testing center in less than 5 minutes.
5. Your privacy will be protected. Samples will be identified by a barcode that is tied to your Belhaven University ID. (If you do not have an ID, you need to stop by security as soon as you return.)
6. We will be able to test 100 people each hour the Testing Center is open. You will be given a window of time to come for testing that fits around your schedule. We want to keep the (socially distanced) wait lines as short as possible.

7. The test is extremely accurate and fast. If our screening test indicates you are positive, you'll be notified the same day. We will then get you an appointment to take a confirming nasal test at certified diagnostic testing center. The State of Mississippi has approved (and applauded) our testing plan, but because this is so new, their regulations require a second test in a clinic, even though it will not be more accurate than the test we are administering on campus.
8. Only students and employees WITHOUT Covid-19 symptoms will be tested. Those who show symptoms will be sent to a certified diagnostic testing center for their required test.
9. There will a little preparation for your test – not eating, brushing your teeth, or using tobacco products within previous 30 minutes. Those requirements will be made clear in the instructional video you will receive the first week of January before you return to campus.
10. Those who have had Covid-19 within the previous 90 days do not need to be tested. The Testing Center will send them a notice of exemption for that three-month window after medical proof has been submitted to our testing staff. Also, these people will not need to quarantine if exposed during these 90 days. *If you have tested positive for Covid-19 after October 18, 2020, be sure to bring that documentation with you to the Testing Center when you arrive for your first scheduled test.*
11. We will only be testing Belhaven students and employees. Unlike all other testing centers in the city, you will not be mixing with the general public. Sorry, but we cannot test families of employees, or your friends and family.
12. We will have the most efficient, safe, and accurate testing process in Mississippi. No other university in our state has become equipped to test at this level. We are grateful God has given us this provision to protect us all.
13. The testing is FREE to you! Alumni and friends are making gifts to pay for tests, and then we will add to their generosity a government grant to cover the cost of equipment, facilities, and staff. The total cost is about \$600,000.

What about quarantines?

1. The Center for Disease control has recommended shortening the current 14-day quarantine period after exposure to a Covid-19 infected individual.
 - If you have been exposed to Covid-19, your quarantine will now end after day 10 without testing and if no symptoms have been reported.
 - OR your quarantine can end after day 7 with a negative diagnostic test conducted within 48 hours before the time of planned quarantine discontinuation.

2. Because of the shortened quarantine time, we will do our best to keep out of state residential students on campus in specially designated quarantine rooms. If the quarantine numbers stay low, we can do this, but if the exposures were as high as they were this fall, we will require residential students to quarantine at home whenever possible. With testing, the quarantine could be only half the time it was this fall, and we do not want you to have to move back home for that short time if there is any way we can provide space on campus. We cannot promise this on campus quarantine option for residential students, but will do our best to make that possible.
3. This fall we allowed students to “self-quarantine” if they believed they had been exposed. That option is eliminated for the spring semester. Campus-wide testing now allows us to do more specific contact tracing, so missing class for quarantine must be approved by the Testing Center. In other words, you may NOT miss class unless you are officially quarantined by the Testing Center.

What else is BU doing to keep us safe from Covid-19 this spring?

1. The expectations of the Belhaven Promise will continue this spring. Masks and social distancing are our very best protection against the virus. On campus, spring semester will look like the fall – you have already proven you can do it. Class sizes will be limited this spring.
2. The government is predicting that college age students with no underlying conditions will not be eligible for the vaccine until after Spring semester ends. But we are working on options to get the vaccine as soon as possible for our older faculty and staff, and those with underlying conditions.
 - It is important to understand that even if you receive the vaccine you could still contract Covid-19. The vaccine is 95% effective in lessening the impact of the virus, not keeping 95% of those vaccinated from getting Covid-19. Also, we will NOT require the vaccine of anyone – that is a decision between you and your doctor.
 - If you have had Covid-19 or been vaccinated, you can still pass on the virus to others. Wearing a mask and keeping distance is still required.
3. As we have all learned, the virus is airborne, which means you can contract it without even being close to someone who is positive. Did you know that 50% of Americans who have Covid-19 had been to a restaurant? (They had to take their mask off to eat.) Thanks to government grants for Covid-19 protection, we have spent nearly a half-million dollars upgrading the heat and cooling systems on campus. In addition, we have cleaned every air duct on campus and installed Bipolar Ionization units in every building.
4. During the early weeks of the spring semester, we will keep many of the staff working from home. We also encourage faculty to work from home when not teaching a class. This allows more space on campus for students who must live here.

5. This fall we have accommodated students who preferred to study 100% virtually because of concerns about Covid-19. This option for all traditional students will be extended for the spring semester too, although most classes are not offered online and you will need to build an academic schedule from our online offerings and the handful of traditional classes that are being offered virtually. Those studying 100% virtually, may not live on campus or participate in student activities, sports, or Arts. If you would prefer this virtual option, talk with the Registrar's office soon. Unless you are seriously ill, it will not be possible for you to switch to a virtual format once the semester has started.

What can we each do over the Christmas break to help with Covid-19 safety?

1. The most important action we can take to limit being in groups and always wear a mask when around others.
2. Research indicates that college students are not catching the virus from being in class, or even participating on the athletic field. They are catching it from being in groups, on or off campus, without keeping distance, and/or not wearing masks over BOTH their mouth and nose.
3. Make wise decisions while at home during the holidays. Follow the recommendations of your state government. This virus is serious. It does kill, but even for many who survive, the medical complications are significant and long-lasting.
4. If you have the Covid-19 symptoms over the holidays, please get tested BEFORE you return to campus. You will be tested as soon as you arrive on campus, so you do not want to arrive and then have to go directly into quarantine. The symptoms are fever or feeling feverish (sweat or chills), new cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, muscle and/or body aches, vomiting and/or diarrhea, and new loss of taste or smell.

I think you have all been remarkable this fall. And our faculty and staff have been amazing in how they have worked endlessly to make this semester successful. This is a challenging time, but God continues to bring us light in the darkness – as promised in our verse of the year.

I am praying you will have a restorative Christmas and New Year's break.

Merry Christmas!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roger Parrott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue background behind it.

- P. S. If you have not already registered for the spring, I hope you will do so right away. Remember, to receive the free online Master's degree, you must be a full-time traditional student and continuously enrolled until you graduate. If you stop out, or reduce to part-time, you will not be eligible for the free Master's degree. This opportunity is only for students enrolled in the traditional program, so even if you go 100% virtually for spring, make sure you are registered as a traditional student, not as an online student.