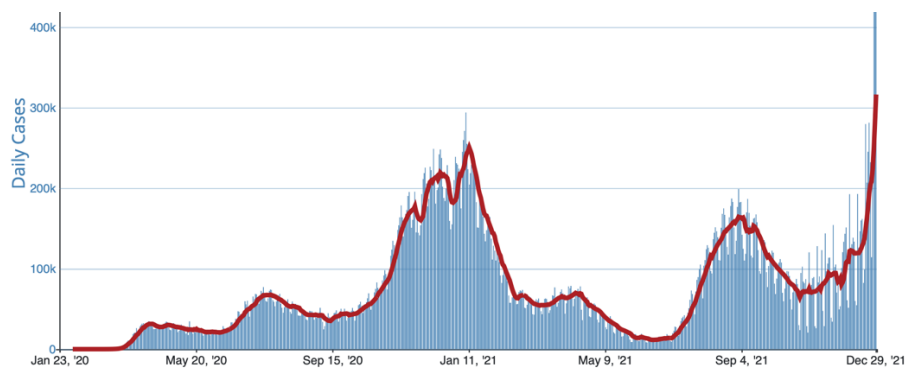


To: Campus Students
From: Roger Parrott
Re: Spring 2022 Semester COVID Plan

As the fall semester ended it appeared we had turned the corner with the pandemic. For the spring semester we had planned to begin chapel and other large group events, and as soon as authorized by the City of Jackson, to lift the mask mandate.

These steps to reduce pandemic containment standards have been preempted by the dramatic surge of the Omicron variant of COVID.

- The difficult news is that unlike the pattern of the pandemic we have experienced during the past two years, the current variant is hyper-contagious.
- The positive news is that for most people, the symptoms are milder, recovery time shorter, and because the virus is spreading so rapidly, it is likely to dissipate nearly as quickly as it has gained strength.



The rapid spread of the virus across the United States is unprecedented. But the number of infections are projected to peak soon and quickly recede. Although symptoms for most are milder, a high percentage of the population will catch COVID over these winter months.

STARTING THE SEMESTER ON TIME

We are carefully watching the progression of Omicron, but are planning to begin the semester on time, with our first classes meeting January 10th. Chapel, RUF, FCA, the MLK Day event, and other large group meetings will be postponed until at least after spring break. A determination about Arts performance audiences will be made in light of the specific venue and timing of the event.

PRECAUTIONS

The “formula” we successfully used to protect the campus in the past will not be as effective with the Omicron variant. However, important precautions can be taken individually:

- A high quality well fitted mask is critical protection (KN-95 masks are the best option or another good choice is a surgical mask worn with a multi-layered fabric mask). We all need to be diligent about wearing a tight-fitting mask indoors. Experts report, “You can catch this Omicron variant if someone's mask is loose, or a person quickly pulls their mask down, or an individual enters an elevator in which someone else has just coughed.” This variant is most often passed at indoor group settings – restaurants, gatherings, parties.
- A previous case of COVID does not protect you from catching Omicron. Being fully vaccinated, plus a booster shot, will dramatically reduce the severity of your symptoms, as well as your risk of death, hospitalization, and COVID-long complications. We will be offering booster shots on campus during January.
- Unlike earlier strains of COVID, broad-based tracking and testing will not be as effective in controlling this variant. With Omicron people generally get symptoms three days after being exposed to the virus, rather than about four days with the Delta variant and five or longer with the original virus. People are probably contagious sooner after exposure – and maybe even before they test positive.

COVID TESTING

1. We will NOT require a negative test before returning to campus.
2. The Federal government requires that all University employed student workers be tested weekly if not fully vaccinated.
3. As required by the athletic conference or Department Chair, Basketball, Dance, and Theatre students will be tested weekly as following the same process as last semester. We will not be testing athletes out of season, like we did this past fall.
4. Symptomatic people MAY be tested on campus unless running a fever.
5. Testing center is open: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday 10:00 am – 1:00 pm.
6. Any student may voluntarily be tested at any time. If you are concerned you’ve been exposed to COVID, use our testing center. Local testing centers are now backlogged, and home tests are difficult to find.

QUARANTINE REQUIREMENTS

1. If you have COVID symptoms you must immediately isolate and get tested. If you live on campus, report your symptoms to your RD who will help you make plans to get care and limit your risk of infecting others. If you live off campus, do not come to campus.
2. We will follow the newly amended CDC isolation standards:

NO SYMPTOMS

- Those who test positive must quarantine for 5 days.

SYMPTOMS

- Those who have been symptomatic, must quarantine for at least 5 days after the start of symptoms.
- Following that period, you may return to campus 24 hours after no fever if your symptoms are resolving.
- When you return to campus, a mask must be worn at all times inside for 5 additional days (even alone in an office on campus).

We will continue to assess and adjust our plans as the circumstances change.

God has wonderfully protected and blessed Belhaven University during the two years of this global pandemic. Yes, it has been tough, but compared to most of the world, we've been extremely fortunate.

- *Don't lose sight of God's goodness to us.*
- *Ask the Lord to give you another boost of perseverance.*
- *Stay kind, because grace honors the name of Christ.*
- *Continue to give your full effort to learn, grow, and serve.*

Alleluia! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

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