

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: Looking ahead to the spring semester

Tuesday, November 3, 2020

Dear Belhaven Students,

You amaze me!

Your commitment to the Belhaven Promise has made this successful semester possible. You have been wise, strong, and unwavering in protecting each other and our faculty/staff, many of whom are high risk. Through the semester we've had only 29 students and 9 faculty/staff catch the virus – thankfully, the cases have been mild.

As I've watched this fall semester unfold, I've thought back over the endless hours of planning for your return to campus. We had far too many questions without answers:

- Could we open at all?
- Will students really follow the Belhaven Promise?
- Could we adjust all the classes to be smaller in size?
- Could faculty really teach wearing a mask?
- How could our coaches inspire teams if we can't compete?
- What happens with the Arts when performances can't be live?
- How can you have fun student activities in groups of 15?
- Does the list never end of what could go wrong with the dining commons or residence halls?

We have made it . . . almost! Three weeks from today is our last day of classes on campus.

Stay focused, and hold to the Belhaven Promise as we tackle these last weeks. *The Covid numbers are rising rapidly across the state, and we need to continue to work together to keep everyone safe.*

Also, pour on an extra dose of grace for these last weeks. Stress is cumulative and this has been a very long semester fighting Covid. Be kind, gentle, and forgiving – be a Christian in a way that others readily see it.

As we look ahead to spring, I want to share some items of importance with you:

1. The semester will begin on time, at the previously announced dates for residential move-in. First classes will be held Monday, January 11th.
2. To be safe, we will follow the pattern of most of higher education, and NOT have Spring Break. Although as usual, we will not hold classes on Martin Luther King Day or Easter weekend (Friday through Monday). And to make sure we get some little breaks through the semester, in case we don't have any real snow days, we are scheduling two tentative "Snow Days" – Tuesday, February 16th, and Wednesday, March 10th.

3. Because we will not have spring break, the semester will conclude one week earlier than originally planned. Last class: April 20th, Final Exams: April 22nd – 26th. We are anticipating that finals will be held normally on campus (not virtually), although that could change if the circumstances merit a shift.
4. Commencement will be one week earlier than originally planned – it will be May 1 in the 10,000 seat Mississippi Coliseum. Not only will the May graduates be honored, but we'll be inviting all those who graduated in May or December of 2020. There is lots of room to spread out in a socially distanced manner.
5. The Belhaven Promise needs to continue this spring. Masks and social distancing are our best protection against the virus. On campus, spring semester will look like the fall – you've already proven you can do it. Class sizes will be limited this spring, as they have been this fall.
6. We will be doing more Covid-19 testing during the spring semester. We will be ramping up regular testing for all athletes and probably for performance artists too. We'll be testing residential students at times. And we will probably be testing all students, faculty, and staff when we begin the spring semester. As tests become easier, faster, and more accessible, we want to take advantage of testing in controlling the virus.
7. The virus is tough for those who have caught it, but the mandatory quarantines have been really rough too. The CDC is examining if quarantines could be shortened with additional testing. We will follow their advice. I assure you, if there is any way not to have as many quarantined, we'll do what it takes to get the testing done.
8. All our athletic teams will be in competition during the spring semester! This is a first – playing football at the same time we're playing softball. We will be limiting the crowd size for indoor sports, and expect you'll do well keeping social distance for outside sports. Go Blazers!
9. Theatre, Dance, and Music will have limited live audiences for productions during the spring. Bravo!
10. Chapel will continue online during the spring and will not be required. If you've not had time to follow chapel, maybe over the break you can catch up – we've looked in detail at the importance of prayer.
11. This fall we have accommodated students who preferred to study virtually because of concerns about Covid-19. This option for all traditional student will be extended for the spring semester too. Those studying 100% virtually, may not live on campus or participate in student activities, sports, or Arts.
12. If you've not already registered for the spring, I hope you'll 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're registered as a traditional student, not as an online students.

The CDC is expecting a dramatic spike in Covid-19 cases as families gather for Thanksgiving and Christmas. As you go home, I trust you'll be extra cautious.

You've done great . . . really great! But the battle is not over. Stay smart and stay strong. God has "dawned His light in the darkness" for Belhaven this semester. Thanks be to God – and thanks to all of you!