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COVID-19 Campus Update, January 28, 2021

Eastern Michigan University

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COVID-19 Campus Update – Jan. 28, 2021

Thursday, January 28, 2021

To the Eastern Michigan University community:

The optimist in me wants to embrace the notion that we are rounding the corner to a return to a post pandemic “new normal.” The pragmatist/realist in me is far more cautious and concerned about the days and weeks ahead. While positive COVID-19 cases in Michigan are stabilizing, the highly contagious variant strain B.1.1.7. is becoming more prevalent. Many of you may be aware of yesterday’s public health action at the University of Michigan, recommending that students there stay-in-place to curtail the spread of the new strain. While this is not the case at Eastern, we are seeing an increase in case counts in our community. Currently, we do not have any indication whether or not the uptick is due to the variant strain, but it is nevertheless very concerning and we need to remind ourselves that we are clearly not out of the woods.

Because vaccinations are underway, the temptation for many people can be to let their guard down. I’ve observed it myself. Some people are not wearing face coverings properly, or at all. The reminders about hand washing seem not to be taken as seriously. Indoor in-person gatherings, even among individuals on our campus, have started to pop up. To no one’s surprise, we have several positive cases resulting from these actions. I urge you all to continue to observe guidelines for wearing face coverings, physical distancing, and handwashing. Now is not the time to let down our guard!

I have several items to cover in this week’s update:

- COVID-19 Dashboard
- COVID-19 Testing Changes
- Preliminary Summer and Fall Semester Planning
- Continued Support for DACA Recipients
- Swoop’s Food Pantry Update
- Celebrating Eastern Michigan University excellence
- Health and safety reminder

COVID-19 Dashboard

In the seven days ending Jan. 26, the University administered 1,457 COVID-19 tests that resulted in 39 positive cases, for a positivity rate of 2.68 percent. During this time period, we confirmed a total of 58 positive cases. Of those, 13 were students who live off-campus and had no contact with campus prior to the time they tested positive and 42 were on-campus students – defined as a student who was living on campus or had visited campus during the applicable time period prior to the time they tested positive. Three cases were reported among University employees.

Since Aug. 12, the University has administered a total of 19,789 tests that resulted in 215 positive results for an overall positivity rate of 1.09 percent. Complete details can be found on the University's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

Our weekly case count is the highest it's been since the start of the pandemic; hence my cautionary message at the beginning of this week's update. We have identified several causes for this, and actions have been implemented to address them and mitigate additional spread. We continue to work closely with the Washtenaw County Health Department and appreciate their support of our actions to address the current caseload. As stated earlier, we do not currently have evidence of the coronavirus variant B.1.1.7. in our campus community though there are confirmed cases in Washtenaw County.

It is important to remember that our overall positivity rate remains low and that the actions we implemented when facing a similar increase in late October/early November effectively resulted in lower case numbers.

COVID-19 Testing Changes

Our free testing for students and employees has been positively received and we have been working hard to expand test availability for the remainder of the semester. I am pleased to announce that expanded testing – double our current capacity -- is scheduled to begin the week of Feb. 8. Please join me in acknowledging the fine work of Dr. Lynn Shetron, professor and program director for Clinical Laboratory Sciences, and Dr. Sherry Bumpus, director of nursing operations for the School of Nursing, in leading this effort, as well as the work of so many other experts on our campus who have supported this initiative. Please watch your email – we will have additional information about this next week.

Beginning Tuesday, Feb. 2, we will relocate our testing center to the Student Center on the south side of the building where Amazon formerly operated. This will provide us with the space to significantly expand testing. The larger space and its location in the Student Center will be assets to our expanded testing process. It also provides easier access for parking and bathrooms, and offers improved accessibility. We plan to continue to offer testing to our entire campus community, while increasing mandatory testing for students living in EMU residential housing and other higher risk populations.

Preliminary Summer and Fall Semester Planning

As noted in last week's message, we are currently planning for Summer "A" courses to be primarily scheduled remotely much as we have scheduled winter semester. We believe Summer "B" may be able to include more in-person classes but still offer proportionally more online opportunities. This information is preliminary but as I have said so many times this past year is subject to revision based on changing conditions on and beyond campus.

We are actively considering plans for the fall semester, with some expectation of a return to a “new normal” that will include in-person classes as well as expanded hybrid and online course delivery. The planning process is in the preliminary stages and will be finalized with the University community’s input in the weeks ahead. I can assure you that our #EMUSafe practices will remain at the forefront of the planning process.

Continued Support for DACA Recipients

With the change in administration, I am pleased to report that the future of DACA -- the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program -- appears now to be on firmer ground. The program, which began in 2012, allows non-citizens who arrived in the United States before the age of 16 to remain here without risk of deportation under specified circumstances. Our University has stood, and continues to stand, steadfastly in support of the program, which, among other things, allows non-citizens to seek and pursue higher education in the United States. Although we were dismayed in recent years at some attempts to weaken DACA, recent actions offer renewed hope and the promise of increased stability for DACA recipients.

Specifically, the DACA program now has largely been restored to its original state, and will accept both renewals of status and first-time requests providing two years of DACA protection. Moreover, on Jan. 20, 2021--his first day in office-- President Biden issued a Memorandum directing the Department of Homeland Security take all actions “consistent with applicable law, to preserve and fortify” DACA, signaling that the program is a priority for the new President. President Biden also sent a bill to the new Congress, the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, which would provide a roadmap to citizenship for all undocumented non-citizens. Although a legal challenge to the program remains pending in federal court, increased legislative protection for the DACA program would effectively end such challenges.

As we watch these developments, here on campus we continue to support and advocate for our non-citizen students. We will continue to raise our voices on their behalf at both the state and national levels, contact our congressional representatives, share our students' stories, and provide resources to assist them, both on campus and off. If you'd like to get involved in this effort, please visit the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration (presidentsalliance.org); here you can download a sample advocacy letter or to simply keep abreast of the myriad issues that surround this concern, one that impacts the daily lives of thousands of young people in our country.

Swoop's Food Pantry Update

The winter hours for the John and Angie Sabo Swoop's Food Pantry Room are Mondays 12 - 5 p.m., Wednesdays 12 - 6:30 p.m., and Thursdays 12 - 5 p.m.

Shoppers are requested to complete an [Online Shopping Request Form](#) before arriving. Items will be bagged by staff and brought out to clients when they arrive. Visitors to Swoop's can enter through the main entrance on the north side of Pierce Hall near the elevator. Swoop's requires any student who has not used the pantry this year to complete the new [2020-21 Swoop's Food Pantry Intake Form](#).

If you wish to donate items, please email swoops_pantry@emich.edu in advance to make sure someone is present to handle your delivery. Please maintain physical distancing when picking up or delivering items to the Pantry.

Celebrating Eastern Michigan University excellence

Please join me in celebrating these fine examples of Eastern excellence:

- Lori Marie Kay, a registered nurse at St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia and a student in the RN to BSN online program, performed to a nationwide television audience on Jan. 19 as part of the inauguration events of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. "It's an honor to be here with you, and with President-elect Biden," Kay said as she prepared to sing "Amazing Grace" in front of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, which was framed by 400 glowing lights signifying the 400,000 American deaths from COVID. You can watch her performance [here](#) and find additional details and background in this [EMU Today story](#).
- Stephanie Wladkowski, professor of social work, [has been chosen as a Sojourns@Scholar](#), one of 12 emerging palliative care leaders in the United States. The scholars program is administered by the Cambia Health Foundation and is designed to identify and advance the next generation of palliative care leaders. Each scholar receives \$180,000 in funding (\$90,000/year over a two-year period) to conduct an innovative and impactful project in the field of palliative care. Dr. Wladkowski's project will build her previous work on hospice care. In 2020, she received a \$427,276 grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study the needs of patients' post-hospice discharge and how patients and their caregivers attempt to meet those needs. She said she will use the funding to develop a live discharge protocol (LDP) for hospice social workers to guide their assessment of the specific service and psychosocial needs for the patient and primary caregiver during post-hospice care.
- U.S. News and World Report features two Eastern programs in its latest rankings of top online programs in the United States. The [Integrated Marketing Communications \(IMC\) program was ranked 60th in the country](#), and second in Michigan, in the category of non-MBA master's programs. [Online graduate programs in the College of Education were ranked 144th this year](#), in the top four among the Michigan public university online education programs. The College of

Education has online master's programs in Educational Leadership, Educational Psychology, Special Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Education and the Social Foundations of Education.

Congratulations to everyone involved in these fine efforts!

Health and Safety Reminder

An important reminder as I conclude. Please continue to:

- Practice effective hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers;
- Wear face coverings; and,
- Observe physical distancing.

These three actions, when taken together, dramatically reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19.

I thank you for your work on behalf of the University and your ongoing support of our #EMUSafe initiatives. Please continue to follow the [University's COVID-19 Planning and Preparedness website](#) for ongoing updates.

James Smith, Ph.D.