

2021

## COVID-19 Campus Update, March 11, 2021

Eastern Michigan University

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## COVID-19 Campus Update – March 11, 2021

Thursday, March 11, 2021

To the Eastern Michigan University community:

The Washtenaw County Health Department (WCHD) is now vaccinating approximately 1,100 people daily at the clinic operating at the University's Convocation Center. This number has increased as vaccine supplies have become more available. The clinic is operating Wednesday – Saturday from 9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m. WCHD is considering expanding those hours as vaccine supplies allow. The County has opened a second mass vaccination clinic at Pierce Lake Elementary School in Chelsea, in collaboration with St. Joseph Mercy Chelsea Hospital and the Chelsea School District. The new site will provide approximately 325 vaccinations per day and will also add additional hours as supplies allow.

[Vaccination eligibility information](#) is online; you can also [register for a vaccination](#) online if you are eligible.

As of March 9, the County reports 65.6% of residents 65 or older have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. For residents 16 and over, 24.6% have received at least the first dose. The data is being updated regularly – visit the [WCHD vaccination tracking site](#) for details.

This is encouraging data and we will continue to monitor it, as well as report the number of new cases and positivity rates, as we actively plan for a higher number of in-person classes and campus activities for the fall semester.

I have several updates to share this week:

- COVID-19 Dashboard
- COVID-19 Testing
- Summer and Fall Semester Planning
- April Commencement Celebration
- Increasing Pell Grant Maximum Award
- George Liepa Sigma Xi Speaker Series
- Women's History Month Programs Next Week
- Rebuilding the U.S. Refugee Program
- Swoop's Food Pantry Update
- Celebrating Eastern Michigan University Excellence
- Health and Safety Reminder

COVID-19 Dashboard

In the seven days ending March 9, the University administered 1,113 COVID-19 tests that resulted in five positive cases, for a positivity rate of 0.45 percent. During this time, we confirmed a total of seven positive cases. Of those, six were students who live off-campus and had no contact with campus prior to the time they tested positive and one was an on-campus student – 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. No cases were reported among University employees.

Since Aug. 12, the University has administered a total of 27,718 tests with 330 positive results for an overall positivity rate of 1.19 percent -- considerably lower than state and national tracking. Complete details can be found on the University's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

### COVID-19 Testing

We continue to provide free COVID-19 testing at the Student Center at University expense. As noted above, we tested more than 1,100 people last week. The center is open Tuesdays – Thursdays, from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. The process is fast and easy; results are provided within a matter of hours. You can be tested more than once. We encourage frequent testing. Students living in campus housing are tested twice per month. We also are offering a raffle for free giveaways for those who are tested at the Student Center – watch your email and University social media to learn about next week's prize.

A reminder, you must register in advance; on-site registration is not permitted. Visit [emich.edu/covid-testing](https://emich.edu/covid-testing) to complete your profile and reserve a time. Student Body President [Luis Romero explains the easy testing process in this video](#). Please [visit the testing FAQ](#) if you have additional questions.

### Summer and Fall Semester Planning

As we stated last week, planning for the summer and fall semesters is ongoing. The class schedule for Summer A will be similar to last summer – nearly all classes will be taught online. Summer B will also be similar to last summer – with more in-person classes but with the large majority of these still being online.

For the fall semester, we are actively planning for a greater number of in-person classes and on-campus activities. We will continue to offer online/remote courses. Student data nationwide indicate a strong desire for in-person college choices for the fall semester, particularly traditional first-year students entering from high school. As we all know far too well, the pandemic has been marked by progress and setbacks. We are approaching our planning carefully, with safety at the forefront and an understanding that changing circumstances will require adjustments in our overall operations.

### April Commencement Celebration

As communicated previously, we are planning several activities to celebrate our graduating students. A formal ceremony video will be posted at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, April 25. Graduates, families and friends can view the video at that time, or anytime after that at their convenience, on the University's YouTube channel. Students who apply to graduate by March 26 will have their names included in the formal video and posted on the Commencement website. Students should apply for the month they are graduating – whether April or August. August graduates who apply by March 26 as noted above will be included in the April celebration. Please visit the [Records and Registration graduation website](#) to apply for graduation and to find other details and deadlines. Also visit [the Commencement website](#) for ongoing updates about the ceremony as well as the distribution of diplomas and the ordering of regalia.

A reminder, we are planning on having in-person graduation celebrations at a later date for all graduates who did not have an in-person experience due to the pandemic. We are hopeful this will take place during our fall commencement, depending on public health considerations and the removal of restrictions for large gatherings.

### Increasing Pell Grant Maximum Award

I am highly supportive of the growing effort to expand Pell Grant awards to double the current maximum for individual students. The Pell Grant is the federal government's foundational investment in higher education. I have joined with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) in signing a letter to Congress urging a doubling of maximum Pell Grant awards. The letter will be submitted in the days ahead, and states, in part:

“On behalf of the undersigned organizations and institutions, we urge you to bring an affordable, high-quality college education within reach for all students by doubling the maximum Pell Grant. This long overdue investment will drive economic recovery, help address racial and economic inequities in college completion rates, and increase overall educational attainment.

“The Pell Grant program is the nation's foundational investment in higher education. Pell Grants help nearly seven million low- and moderate-income students attend and complete college annually. Students from all 50 states and all corners of the country — from rural areas to cities to everywhere in between — rely on the Pell Grant program to build their future. Pell Grants are especially critical for students of color, with nearly 60 percent of Black students, half of American Indian or Alaska Native students, and nearly half of Latinx students receiving a Pell Grant each year.

“However, the share of college costs covered by the grant is at an all-time low. At its peak, the maximum grant covered three-quarters of the cost of attending a four-year public college. Now, it covers less than one-third of that cost.

“Unsurprisingly, Pell Grant recipients continue to bear disproportionate student debt burdens. Pell Grant recipients today are more than twice as likely as other students to have student loans, and grant recipients who borrow graduate with over \$4,500 more debt than their higher-income peers.

“Students from low- and moderate-income families are in critical need of additional grant aid to pay for college. Doubling the maximum Pell Grant — and permanently indexing the grant to inflation to ensure its value doesn’t diminish over time — will boost college enrollment, improve graduation rates, and honor the history and value of these grants as the keystone federal investment in college affordability.”

### George Liepa Sigma Xi Speaker Series

Dr. Anne Casper, a professor of Biology known for her research and strong support of students, will present the annual George Liepa Sigma Xi Speaker Series in a virtual talk Thursday, March 18 from 7 – 8 p.m. Her Zoom talk is entitled “Effective Teaching to Support Inclusivity and Diversity in STEM.” The event is free and open to the public, including all members of the EMU community.

Dr. Casper, a winner of the Ronald W. Collins Distinguished Professor Award, EMU’s highest academic honor, has active research programs in both science education, supported by the National Science Foundation, and in molecular genetics, supported by the National Institutes of Health, as noted in this [profile on EMU Today](#).

The George Liepa Sigma XI Speaker Series Endowed Fund was established in 2011 in memory of the late [George Liepa](#), a professor of human nutrition and a department head in the College of Health and Human Services. Dr. Liepa was an active member of Sigma XI, a national Scientific Research Honor Society.

### Women’s History Month Programs Next Week

Tuesday, March 16, 1 – 5 p.m. The 4th Annual Women of Color Feminisms & Leadership Symposium, Day 1, “Reimagining, Rebuilding & Recreating Ourselves as Women of Color”: The EMU Center of Race & Ethnicity, Women’s and Gender Studies and the Women’s Resource Center will host its Fourth Annual Women of Color Feminisms & Leadership Symposium, entitled “Reimagining, Rebuilding & Recreating Ourselves as Women of Color.”

The two-day event continues on Wednesday, March 17, 1 – 5 p.m. It provides a breathable space for Women of Color to envision a world without limitations, unlearn false narratives of who THEY told us we should be and, prioritize healing so that we can create new versions of ourselves without fear. Tarana Burke, founder of the #MeToo” Movement, will serve as the event’s keynote speaker. Registration for the event is required, and can be completed through [the event registration page](#).

Tuesday, March 16, 6:30 - 8 p.m.: "Star Lecture 3: Making her Mark." Join the Honors College for the final Star Lecture of the semester, "Making Her Mark: Marian Butler and Black Women's Efforts to Secure Racial Justice," presented by Dr. Mary-Elizabeth Murphy. The lecture will be hosted via Zoom. For more information, visit [the Honors College Event Calendar](#), or contact Jieron Robinson at 734.487.0341 or [emuhonors@emich.edu](mailto:emuhonors@emich.edu).

## Rebuilding the U.S. Refugee Program

In conjunction with the Presidents' Alliance, Every Campus a Refuge, and the Niskanen Center, I have joined with university colleagues across the country in support of an initiative asking the U.S. Government to enact policies aimed at restoring and rebuilding the nation's refugee program, in part through the incorporation of college- and university-based sponsorship programs of refugee students and families.

The [letter to the U.S. Secretary of State and the Secretary of Health and Human Services](#) can be found online. As in-person instruction returns, I am hopeful that we, as a community with donor partners, can assist in allowing a few refugee students the opportunity to experience the true greatness of EMU.

## 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 [Swoop's Food Pantry Intake Form](#).

Swoop's is seeking ready-to-eat microwaveable items, such as: Kraft macaroni and cheese cups, ravioli and other Chef Boyardee goods, rice pouches and cups, and ramen cups. The pantry also continues to need school supplies such as notebooks, binders, sticky notes and highlighters.

If you wish to donate items, please email [swoops\\_pantry@emich.edu](mailto: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.

[Monetary donations](#) can be made online.

## Celebrating Eastern Michigan University Excellence

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

- Eastern's Simulation, Animation and Gaming (SAG) Program has been ranked among the best in the Midwest and among the top five of its kind in Michigan in annual listings from Animation Career Review. The ninth annual rankings [listed Eastern 18th in the Midwest](#). Brad Prescott, founder of the Animation Career Review, said, "The rankings are quite competitive. With 125 schools under consideration, many go unranked. EMU has consistently ranked as one of the top schools in the Midwest."
- Ryan English, assistant professor in the SAG program said, "The Simulation, Animation, and Gaming faculty is very pleased with our ranking, but we know that there is always room for improvement, which we strive towards. Our students gain exposure to concepts that are quickly and quietly becoming ingrained into the world around us, everything from gamification of careers to mixed reality applications in many fields."
- The 41st annual Undergraduate Symposium will take place on Friday, March 26 in a virtual format. This highlight of undergraduate research and creative projects serves as a cumulative reflection of the academic year. Beginning in 1981, the Symposium was one of the first of its kind in the nation. This year, the event will enter its fifth decade of showcasing exceptional academic undergraduate work from students in a wide variety of departments and colleges. [Visit the EMU Today story](#) for further details and highlights of some of the research to be presented this year. As in past years, this year's virtual event will feature oral speaking presentations, poster displays, and projects from the Crossing Lines Design Expo. The Symposium will host 195 students, under the mentorship of 103 faculty mentors, featured within 178 unique projects. Attendees will find a combination of pre-recorded and live content to view and engage with.
- The annual Graduate Research Conference (GRC) will be held virtually on Friday, March 19. The GRC will exhibit more than 100 scholarly and creative research projects of graduate students across a range of disciplines, departments, and colleges. This year's event will feature live oral presentations every hour, beginning at 9 a.m. until 4:15 p.m. and a live poster session from 10:30 - 11:45 a.m. There will also be recorded oral and poster presentations available to view throughout the entire day. As in years past, there will be a live keynote speaker from noon to 1 p.m. Dr. Shawn T. Mason, a GRC alumnus and current Director of Research and Outcomes for Johnson & Johnson Health and Wellness Solutions, is this year's keynote. The session will include presentations from the two winners of the Virtual 3-Minute-Thesis Competition, students L'Meese Greaney and Dorothy Zahor. For further updates, [visit the GRC website](#).

Congratulations to the students, faculty, staff and alumni who represent Eastern so well!

#### 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.