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COVID-19 Campus Update, March 18, 2021

Eastern Michigan University

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COVID-19 Campus Update – March 18, 2021

Thursday, March 18, 2021

To the Eastern Michigan University community:

Yesterday's murders of eight people in Atlanta, six of them Asian women, are a horrific reminder of the racism faced by Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDA) and Asian individuals and communities. While the motive of the suspect remains under investigation, it is well documented that in the last year, coinciding with the pandemic, there has been a dramatic increase in hate incidents against APIDA that range from verbal harassment and name-calling to shunning and physical acts of violence. This kind of hate runs counter to everything the Eastern Michigan University community stands for. We are committed to addressing all forms of hate and harassment and I encourage you to support our APIDA and Asian community members at this time. Let them know you care. Please remind others that EMU is a welcoming place for people of every background, ethnicity, race, culture and creed.

To report a suspected hate-motivated incident, please call the EMU Police Department at 734.487.1222, visit the Police Station at 1200 Oakwood St., or call the EMU Police Department anonymous tip line at 734.487.4847. Visit [the EMU Police hate crimes page](#) for additional information.

If you or someone you know is seeking supportive resources, visit:

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (if student)

[Employee Assistance Program](#) (if employee)

If you're interested in learning more about Eastern's APIDA and Asian communities, please contact the [Southeast Asian Student Organization](#) or the [Office for International Students and Scholars](#).

I have several additional campus updates to share this week:

- Michigan House of Representatives Higher Education Subcommittee Testimony
- Faculty Members Support Vulnerable Adults Legislation
- First Virtual U.S.-China Agriculture Roundtable
- Women's History Month Final Program Next Week
- Reminder: Free COVID-19 Testing
- COVID-19 Dashboard
- Washtenaw County Vaccination Tracking
- Fall Semester Planning
- Swoop's Food Pantry Update
- Celebrating Eastern Michigan University Excellence
- Health and Safety Reminder

Michigan House of Representatives Higher Education Subcommittee Testimony

This morning, I testified before the Michigan House Higher Education Subcommittee as part of a series of hearings with Michigan public university presidents. In my testimony, I explained that Eastern, like so many of our peers, faces acute challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic as we continue preparing students for high-demand careers that benefit the state of Michigan. I stated that the nationwide impact on higher education from COVID-19 has been catastrophic.

I noted that we are an institution of opportunity – that our mission is to serve students who might not otherwise have the chance to attend college. I then addressed our deeply challenging work in recent years to increase efficiency and reduce costs, and thanked Governor Whitmer for proposing additional funds for higher education in the Fiscal Year 2022 Budget.

Please visit the [testimony overview](#) for a complete look at today's presentation.

Faculty Members Support Vulnerable Adults Legislation

Two faculty members also spoke to Michigan lawmakers this week, advocating for new state laws to protect Vulnerable Adults with disabilities against online predation.

Assistant professors Christina Marsack-Topolewski, Ph.D., LMSW and Annemarie Kelly, JD, LL.M., from the College of Health and Human Services, testified before the Michigan House of Representatives Committee for Families, Seniors, and Children.

Speaking in support of House Bills 4159 and 4160, Kelly and Marsack-Topolewski implored the lawmakers to enact legal protections against online predation of Vulnerable Adults.

They articulated the reasons why Vulnerable Adults need legal safeguards against internet predators. Marsack-Topolewski stated, "Many Vulnerable Adults maintain social connections using the internet and they are at the highest risk for online predation. We need to adopt laws that deter abuse and hold abusers accountable."

Kelly explained, "Michigan already has laws in place to prevent in-person abuse against Vulnerable Adults. These bills modernize our laws to reflect that exploitation occurs online."

If the bills are passed, it will become a criminal act in Michigan to threaten, intimidate, command, force, coerce, or exploit a Vulnerable Adult into providing sexually explicit material. Under Michigan law, Vulnerable Adults include any "individual age 18 or over who, because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical disability, requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently."

Further details about the professors and their testimony can be found in the [story on EMU Today](#).

First Virtual U.S.-China Agriculture Roundtable

As some of you may know, I am an active supporter of the United States Heartland China Association. Next week that group will launch a three-week program, "Shared Challenges to Shared Future: Finding the Way Forward." Billed as the first virtual U.S. China Agriculture Roundtable, the program focuses on how transformations in agriculture can help address the major challenges of our time and stabilize bilateral relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Additional information and registration information is available on the [United States Heartland China Association Agriculture Roundtable event information page](#). I encourage all who might have interest in this complex topic to join for one or more of these virtual sessions.

Women's History Month Final Program Next Week

The final event for Women's History Month takes place from 4-5:30 p.m. next Thursday, March 25: "Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All." The EMU History Section is hosting the event, which will feature Martha Jones, Society of Black Alumni Presidential Professor and Professor of History at Johns Hopkins University. Click on the Zoom link to participate. [Information about all of this month's events celebrating Women's History Month](#) can be found on EMU Today.

Reminder: Free COVID-19 Testing

We continue to provide free COVID-19 testing at the Student Center at University expense. We tested nearly 1,100 people last week. The center is open Tuesday – Thursday, 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 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.

You must register in advance; on-site registration is not permitted.

Visit 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.

COVID-19 Dashboard

In the seven days ending March 16, the University administered 1,078 COVID-19 tests that resulted in five positive cases, for a positivity rate of 0.46 percent. During this time, we confirmed a total of 20 positive cases. Of those, eight were students who live off-

campus and had no contact with campus prior to the time they tested positive and 10 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. Two cases were reported among University employees.

Since Aug. 12, the University has administered a total of 28,796 tests with 335 positive results for an overall positivity rate of 1.16 percent -- considerably lower than state and national tracking. Complete details can be found on the University's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

Washtenaw County Vaccination Tracking

We continue to see encouraging news on the vaccination front. As of March 16, Washtenaw County reports 74.1% of residents 65 or older have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. That's up from 65.6% last week. For residents 16 and over, 27.7% have received at least the first dose – up from 24.6%. The data are being refreshed regularly – visit [the WCHD vaccination tracking site](#) for ongoing updates.

The Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (TheRide), in partnership with the Washtenaw County Health Department, has announced free transportation to the Convocation Center vaccination site. The service began yesterday. Anyone with a scheduled appointment at the site may use the service. All fares normally charged will be paid for using the federal Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding.

Fall Semester Planning

We are in the process of planning for the Fall 2021 semester. President Biden recently announced that the pace of vaccinations is now ahead of the goal his administration set earlier this year. As a result, we have started to plan for a return to a significantly increased number of in-person classes and on-campus activities this fall. Our current planning scenarios include one in which courses that have an in-person component account for approximately 65% to 75% of the fall course schedule, and two other scenarios with reduced levels of in-person activities (50% and 20-25%). This new baseline schedule is more similar to a traditional fall semester structure, but it does reflect an increased number of online offerings and hybrid modalities. We have learned during the pandemic that there is increased demand for different types of online course opportunities. However, we also understand that for many students, particularly those in their first and second years, a more traditional in-person/on-campus experience provides the greatest opportunity for a successful start to achieving their degree.

Of course, we are approaching our planning cautiously and carefully, with safety considerations a primary consideration. Our #EMUSafe initiatives, led by our public health work teams, have guided the institution to a low overall COVID-19 case count relative to other universities in Michigan. We will continue to engage our faculty and

staff experts to adjust protocols accordingly, with the safety of our students, faculty and staff paramount in all we do. The aforementioned planning scenarios ensure that, should we not be able to operate at the in-person capacity noted above, we are prepared to adjust our operations.

I thank our students, faculty and staff for their adjustments and hard work to get us through the semester. I remain deeply grateful for our faculty's extraordinary efforts to adapt course delivery and our student's compliance with the many practices necessary to keep one another safe and our case numbers low.

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 large juice, baby food, baby wipes, beans and sponges.

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.

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

Celebrating Eastern Michigan University Excellence

Since the pandemic began, 89.1WEMU has been unable to produce traditional on-air fundraisers, which typically ran seven to eight days in duration and included dozens of in-studio guests from the community with hundreds of volunteers. Instead, the station has relied on a series of 'pop-up' fundraisers, short one- and two-day events centered on special days or activities that feature recorded messages from the WEMU team and carefully managed and appropriately distanced live pitch breaks.

The most recent 'pop-up' was yesterday, recognizing St. Patrick's Day. Dubbed 'The Raising of the Green,' WEMU set out to collect \$17,000 in 13 hours. WEMU met the goal before noon and, not wanting to lose the momentum generated by that response, doubled the goal to \$34,000. Assisted by some spontaneous challenge matches and a focused, motivated WEMU team, the fundraiser ended with a total of \$38,610; more than \$21,000 over the original goal of \$17,000. Some donor comments from yesterday are below:

- “During COVID, WEMU was a life saver: deepest thanks.”
- “Thank you to WEMU for exceptional local news and inspired local music hosts for helping us get through the dark days of the past year!”
- “Thanks for keeping the news, blues, jazz, and roots flowing through our community veins -we need it now more than ever.”
- “Thanks WEMU for being a rock for the community during the pandemic.”

WEMU's next pop-up fundraiser will celebrate Public Radio Music Day on Friday, April 16. Congratulations #TeamWEMU!

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;
- Observe physical distancing; and,
- Get vaccinated as you are eligible.

These four 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.