

2020

COVID-19 Campus Update, December 3, 2020

Eastern Michigan University

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Thursday, December 3, 2020

COVID-19 Campus Update – December 3, 2020

To the Eastern Michigan University community:

I hope you had a warm and safe Thanksgiving holiday. It was a different kind of holiday for sure. For the most part, gatherings were smaller and I hope safety was at the forefront for you, as it was for me. Despite the circumstances, the holiday still provided a wonderful opportunity to reflect on all we are thankful for.

The University continues to closely monitor external and internal factors surrounding COVID-19 in order to assess, implement and adjust practices and operations to keep our community as safe as possible. Your flexibility and willingness to support these efforts are a major reason for our success in keeping our case numbers relatively low, particularly in comparison to many peer institutions.

We have several items to cover in this week's message:

- Important modifications to the winter semester schedule
- Winter semester registration
- COVID-19 Dashboard
- Stress and anxiety during the pandemic and holiday season
- Celebrating the December 2020 graduating class
- New scholarship program to support Michigan's frontliners
- Reminder: Call for proposals from MLK Planning Committee
- Swoop's Food Pantry Update
- Celebrating Eastern Michigan University excellence
- Health and safety reminder

Important modifications to the winter semester schedule

In October we announced that we would delay the start of winter semester classes to Wednesday, Jan. 13, in order to reduce the number of people returning directly from the break with possible exposure to the COVID-19 virus. In addition to this important step, the University is adding another important layer to the winter semester safety effort. When winter semester courses begin on Jan. 13, courses will be held in fully online/remote formats through Sunday, Jan. 24. Beginning Monday, Jan. 25, a limited number of those classes will transition to in-person formats as indicated on course schedules.

The Provost conferred with Faculty Senate and other campus constituencies in making this recommendation to me for approval. I greatly appreciate the ongoing adjustments among our students, faculty and staff to accommodate these changes in what remains a very fluid and ever changing situation due to the pandemic. We understand that it

places an additional planning burden on everyone and we value the efforts of our University community to keep the campus as safe as possible. The overall course delivery model for winter will be similar to the current semester in which approximately 10 percent of all courses are in-person.

Winter semester registration

Registration for winter semester is now open to all students. Students are encouraged to register as soon as possible for their winter classes to ensure they get the classes they want. Please visit the [winter registration appointments page](#) to start or complete the registration process. Advisers are available to assist students in determining their classes and meeting program requirements. Information about how to contact an adviser and other details are available on the winter registration site.

COVID-19 Dashboard

In the seven days ending Dec. 1, the University administered 848 tests that resulted in six positive cases, for a positivity rate of 0.71 percent. During this time period, we confirmed a total of 34 positive cases. Of those, 14 were students who live off-campus and had no contact with campus prior to the time they tested positive; 17 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 11,703 tests that resulted in 94 positive results for a positivity rate of 0.80 percent. Complete details can be found on the University's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

Our overall number of cases remains lower than most of our peer universities in the state. This is due to your support and compliance with the rules and processes we have put in place over the course of the semester. We continue to actively monitor wastewater to identify biomarkers of COVID-19 and adjust our student testing plans accordingly. Our active response and contact tracing teams are working aggressively to follow up on irregularities and quarantine or isolate individuals as cases are identified.

This being said, it is important for all of us to understand that as the number of cases continues to increase in the state and nation, our positive case count will be affected. This is why we remain hyper-vigilant in the mandatory policy of wearing face coverings, completing the [COVID PASS Daily Health Screening](#) for those on or visiting campus, practicing physical distancing, and frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizers.

Stress and anxiety during the pandemic and holiday season

This continues to be a challenging time for everyone. For some, those challenges will increase as we head into the holiday season. As we have communicated on several

occasions during the course of the pandemic, the University offers support services to students and employees:

- For students: Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is dedicated to addressing the mental health needs of Eastern Michigan University students. CAPS offers free and confidential counseling by calling 734-487-1118 during business hours and after-hours in the evenings and weekends. For additional information, visit the [CAPS website](#) or contact the office by email at counseling.services@emich.edu.
- For employees: The University's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available for expert advice and support. EAP provides free, confidential help with personal and work-related issues, 24/7. The EAP is available to employees and their family members. Additional information can be found at the [EMU Employee Assistance Program webpage](#).

Celebrating the December 2020 graduating class

Even though we can't be physically together, we can come together virtually to cheer on the December 2020 graduating class and acknowledge all that they've achieved. Please join me in sending a short video offering congratulations to our newest graduates. Send your video to grad_2020@emich.edu. In your email, please include your name and your connection to the EMU community (if alumni, include grad year, faculty or staff title, community member, etc.).

The deadline to receive videos is Saturday, Dec. 12, 2020. The final compilation will be published on commencement morning, Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020.

New scholarship program to support Michigan's frontliners

In partnership with Henry Ford College (HFC), we proudly announced yesterday a first of its kind program to provide scholarship opportunities to Michigan workers identified as Frontliners - those who work in essential industries. The new program builds on Governor Whitmer's "[Futures for Frontliners](#)" program, which pays for frontline workers to earn a tuition-free degree from a local community college. Under our initiative with HFC, frontliners who graduate from HFC qualify for scholarships to complete their bachelor's degree.

Michigan's frontline workers have worked tirelessly around the clock for months to maintain essential services and to keep our communities safe. This new scholarship initiative is an extension of the excellent collaboration we have had with Henry Ford College for many years and provides a new opportunity to reward frontline workers by creating an affordable path to a college degree.

The program has already received significant local and national attention, including [CNN](#), [Crain's Detroit Business](#) and [The Detroit News](#). Governor Whitmer issued this statement: "This is great news for the hundreds of thousands of brave men and women who have been serving on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it's good news for our economy. From the beginning, creating paths to prosperity for more Michiganders has been a top priority for my administration. I'm proud that our state has developed a way to give back to the Michiganders who have been working around the clock to protect us, and I am grateful for this partnership between Henry Ford College and Eastern Michigan University to help more people get on a path to opportunity."

Additional details about the program can be found in the [news release](#).

Reminder: Call for proposals from MLK Planning Committee

The MLK Planning Committee continues to seek proposals from faculty, staff, students, and community members for virtual academic sessions that support this year's MLK celebration, "We the People Speak: No Justice, No Peace." Proposals are due by the end of business tomorrow, Friday, Dec. 4. Complete details can be found on the University's [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration website](#). We are pleased to announce this year's [keynote speaker is Yamiche Alcindor](#), PBS NewsHour White House correspondent and NBC and MSNBC political contributor.

Swoop's Food Pantry Update

The fall hours for the John and Angie Sabo Swoop's Food Pantry Room are Mondays and Thursdays from 12 - 5 p.m., and Wednesdays from 12 - 6:30 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. Maintain physical distancing when picking up or delivering items to the Pantry.

Donations for Swoop's Holiday Baskets can be made through Monday, Dec. 7. The baskets will be distributed on December 11. You can sign-up to donate items on the [Holiday Baskets 2020 site](#).

Celebrating Eastern Michigan University excellence

I am pleased to celebrate these great examples of Eastern excellence!

- School of Social Work receives grant of more than \$200,000 to support at-risk youth: Faculty from the School of Social Work have received a \$221,680 grant to help create a program that provides housing security for young adults ages 18-24 experiencing homelessness, specifically as they transition out of juvenile detention facilities or jail in Washtenaw County. Faculty members leading the effort include [Jennifer Kellman Fritz](#), social work professor and director of the School of Social Work; [Barbara Walters](#), social work professor; and, [Bonnie Miller](#), social work lecturer. Complete details can be found in this [news release](#).
- Record-setting Giving TRUEDAY: Alumni, faculty, staff, students, and friends came together for the University's annual day of giving, #GIVINGTRUEDAY. Over 1,300 supporters donated more than \$1.2 million to a variety of scholarships, programs, and services in 24 hours on Tuesday. The day included several matching gift challenges, including a one-to-one match for gifts to the EMU Student Emergency Fund by EMU Student Government, up to \$20,000. In a show of support, the EMU faculty union, EMU-AAUP, generously also contributed \$20,000 to double the matching gift challenge for all gifts to the Student Emergency Fund. The Student Emergency Fund has provided essential financial support for more than 500 students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the other matching gift efforts happening throughout the day were for the Dr. Zafar Khan College of Business Endowed Scholarship, the Mary E. Vielhaber Women in Management Scholarship Fund, Campus Life Student Organizations, and the College in Prison Program.
- WEMU is 55: 89.1, WEMU, the University's public radio station, celebrates its 55th anniversary on Tuesday, Dec. 8. Originally established as an in-dorm service to broadcast EMU sports to students, the station has evolved into an award-winning NPR affiliate with a weekly audience of over 55,000, and is available worldwide via online streaming and with a free mobile app. With a focus on community engagement, WEMU's format of local news, jazz, blues, and world music complements the national news, information, and cultural programs from NPR. WEMU presents 14 local newscasts per weekday and produces eight locally-hosted music programs per week. The station continues to be a national leader in jazz radio and regularly features local and regional newsmakers and community figures on news programs. Tune in at 89.1 or online at wemu.org on Dec. 8 to hear anniversary messages from a variety of community leaders and musicians and reflections from General Manager, Molly Motherwell, and News Director, David Fair, at 9:49 a.m.

Congratulations to everyone involved in these fine efforts!

Health and Safety Reminder

An important note as I conclude this week's message. Health professionals are increasingly concerned that people experiencing non-COVID related health issues are avoiding medical care due to their concerns about possible virus exposure in hospitals and medical facilities. It is important that those experiencing health issues, whether

COVID related or not, pursue appropriate care. If you have a health concern for which you would typically go to a clinic or hospital, please continue that practice without delay.

As I do each week, I will conclude with an important health and safety reminder. 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.