

2020

COVID-19 Campus Update – December 18, 2020

Eastern Michigan University

Friday, December 18, 2020

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To the Eastern Michigan University community:

Wow. This is the final week of a remarkable and (I'll use that word) unprecedented semester, one marked by fantastic effort on so many fronts to keep our students, faculty and staff safe and to keep on track academically.

There are many congratulations to go around, for efforts I've detailed in previous messages, but today I want to focus on our fall semester graduates, more than 1,500 in all, who have completed the last leg of their academic journey under the singular circumstances imposed by COVID-19. To you all I say: Well done! What a marvelous accomplishment, one you can speak of with pride and perhaps a bit of wonderment in the years to come.

Normally this Saturday, I would be enjoying one of my favorite days of the year – Eastern Michigan University commencement at the Convocation Center. One of my great treats as President is greeting graduates as they leave the prep room and enter the arena. I can read the excitement, fulfillment and anticipation in the faces.

Special challenges call for a special ceremony however, and we've prepared what we feel is an exciting virtual ceremony, scheduled to premiere at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, Dec. 19, graduation day. More on the specifics of that ceremony later in this message.

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

- Important modifications to the winter semester schedule
- Winter semester registration
- Personal wellness days
- COVID-19 Dashboard
- Celebrating the December 2020 graduating class
- Swoop's Food Pantry Update
- Celebrating Eastern Michigan University excellence
- Health and safety reminder

Reminder: 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, I want to remind you that the University is adding another important layer to the winter semester safety effort.

When winter semester courses begin on Jan. 13, most courses will be held in fully online/remote formats through Sunday, Jan. 24. Beginning Monday, Jan. 25, a limited number of classes will transition to in-person formats as indicated on course schedules.

I've said it before, but it bears repeating: 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.

The collaborative effort has been outstanding, one we'll remember for a long time. 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 now open

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.

Important note: We will have key offices associated with registration open for special hours during the holiday break. Academic Advisors will have limited advising appointments available on December 28-30 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Information is available below for how to schedule an advising appointment or do a drop in advising session (college specific):

College of Arts and Sciences (drop-in appointments, Dec. 28): emich.zoom.us/my/casadvice

College of Education (drop-in): <https://emich.zoom.us/my/coedropinadvising>

College of Engineering and Technology (appointment required): <https://booknow.appointment-plus.com/7qc1j7vq/>

If you have other quick advising questions, please call 734.487.0400 to speak to someone for assistance.

Personal Wellness Days

Following discussions between the Faculty Senate and the Provost, I have designated Wednesday, March 3, and Thursday, March 4, as academic "personal wellness days." University offices will remain in operation, but no classes will be held on these two days. We hope that this short break will provide students with a well-deserved opportunity to catch up and time for personal care, particularly with this year's elimination of the

traditional one-week winter recess. We appreciate the constructive feedback from the Faculty Senate, and thank faculty and instructors in advance for their flexibility as they adjust their winter semester schedules.

COVID-19 Dashboard

In the seven days ending Dec. 15, the University administered 768 COVID-19 tests that resulted in 23 positive cases, for a positivity rate of 2.99 percent. During this time period, we confirmed a total of 31 positive cases. Of those, eight were students who live off-campus and had no contact with campus prior to the time they tested positive; 22 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. One case was reported among University employees.

Since Aug. 12, the University has administered a total of 13,712 tests that resulted in 131 positive results for a positivity rate of 0.96 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. As we enter winter semester, we will 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.

Please note that our Dashboard will be updated less frequently over the upcoming break as the University will be closed for a period of time. We will resume updating the Dashboard several times per week when the winter semester begins.

Celebrating the December 2020 graduating class

As I noted, even though we can't be physically together, we will come together virtually to celebrate the December 2020 graduating class and acknowledge all that they've achieved. The University has prepared a special celebration and other enjoyable elements to honor the class.

Graduates, families and others are invited to join us for a virtual commencement ceremony on Saturday, Dec. 19. An official ceremony video and other content will be available starting at 9:30 a.m. The ceremony will include special remarks from Board of Regents Chair James Webb, Provost and Executive Vice President Rhonda Longworth and myself.

There will also be remarks by Dean Dana Heller (CAS), Dean Kenneth Lord (COB), Dean Micheal Saylor (COE), Dean Mohamad Qatu (CET), Dean Murali Nair (CHHS), and John Staunton, Associate Dean of the Honors College. The Alumni Association will also have a special message of welcome. Graduates' names will be listed on the website, and there will be social media filters, to help you honor this milestone on your favorite platform. See the website at emich.edu/commencement for a look at what's to come.

Swoop's Food Pantry Update

The John and Angie Sabo Swoop's Food Pantry Room will be closed through Jan. 10, reopening on Monday, Jan. 11. Thanks to everyone who contributed this semester to this most important campus resource for our students. For any questions, email swoops_pantry@emich.edu

Celebrating Eastern Michigan University excellence

We have several examples of Eastern Excellence to highlight this week.

Moot Court

The national champion Eastern Michigan University moot court program has started right where it left off last winter, experiencing a successful regional season this fall. The team is headed to the national championships next month.

EMU held its first ever virtual regional moot court competition last month, with 30 teams from across the nation. More than 50 of EMU's moot court program alumni from around the country judged the competition.

EMU participated in three regionals overall, fielding nine teams of two students. Six of those teams, two at each regional, made it through the preliminary rounds and into the knockout rounds on the second day, and two of the six teams earned bids to the American Moot Court National Finals in January.

Among students earning bids are two students new to the program, Katlyn Collins and Meagan Putnam. Avery Wright, who attended last year's Nationals, and Charles Graham III, the defending national champion as well as the third-ranked individual oralist in the nation for 2020, also advanced after a strong showing.

Collins and Putnam finished fourth at the Cleveland-Marshall Regional and Wright and Graham became the Champions of the Great Lakes Regional with an impressive 12-2 record in a very strong field. Congratulations to these students for their outstanding efforts in this most rigorous competition.

Gen.G. Scholarship

Eastern Michigan University freshman Joaquin Pizana, of Adrian, Mich., is among the first class of recipients for the Gen.G Foundation scholarship, awarded by the Global esports organization Gen.G.

Pizana is one of 11 college students from around the country that were chosen to receive the scholarship, which focuses on supporting women, people of color, and low-income students enrolled in a U.S. university or college who are interested in gaming, esports, entrepreneurship, journalism or content creation.

Each student chosen will receive \$10,000 to subsidize their tuition for this academic year, and will be a part of Gen.G's ongoing programming in 2021 for mentorship and career development.

Campus closure

A reminder that, other than the special offices noted above, the EMU campus is closed from Thursday, Dec. 24 through Sunday Jan. 3. This will likely be my last weekly message until Thursday, Jan. 7.

Health and Safety Reminder

As I have done each week this semester, I will conclude with an important health and safety reminder to follow during this most deserved holiday break for all of you. 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 outstanding work on behalf of the University and your ongoing support of our #EMUSafe initiatives this semester.

Please continue to follow the [University's COVID-19 Planning and Preparedness website](#) for ongoing updates.

James Smith, Ph.D.