

2021

## COVID-19 Campus Update – April 23, 2021

Eastern Michigan University

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## COVID-19 Campus Update – April 23, 2021

Friday, April 23, 2021

Graduation day is upon us! This Sunday, more than 2,000 bachelor's, master's and doctoral graduates are eligible to participate in our virtual graduation ceremony, along with their families, friends and supporters.

We are so proud of what group of graduates has accomplished! They have persisted and overcome obstacles that most never imagined when they joined the Eastern Michigan University community. While a virtual celebration may not be exactly what this year's graduates envisioned when they started their degree programs – it is necessary due to public health gathering restrictions and our efforts to do our very best to try to keep people safe. Our Convocation Center is routinely packed with more than 8,000 people for Commencement. Sadly, it's just not possible to hold an event of this nature at this time no matter how much we might like to celebrate together.

That being said, we have worked hard to develop a positive, fun and memorable commencement experience. The celebration includes a formal Commencement video and [an interactive website where more than 700 messages, videos, GIFs and photos have already been posted](#) by family members, friends and supporters. Graduates will receive an email and text message Sunday morning offering a fun, interactive social media filter so they can individually celebrate and share their achievements.

The excitement begins Sunday morning at 9:30 a.m. To participate, [visit the Commencement website](#). The video will be posted on the site for viewing at any time after the 9:30 premier.

We are planning to hold in-person celebrations at a later date for all graduates from this year -- and last year -- who have not had an in-person recognition due to the pandemic. We are hopeful this will take place during this fall's commencement, depending on public health considerations and guidelines.

The University's Multicultural Graduation Celebration, hosted by the Center of Race and Ethnicity, took place today. The event celebrated the achievements of students of color, both domestic and international, as well as the rich culture of our diverse student body.

I have several additional updates to share this week:

- Forensics Team Fifth in Nation, Student Wins National Championship
- Professor's Campus Kindness Project Subject of Documentary
- New "Gaming Ring of Honor" Award Established
- COVID-19 Vaccinations
- COVID-19 Dashboard
- Free COVID-19 Testing Schedule Next Week
- Participate in Denim Day to Support Sexual Assault Awareness Month
- Swoop's Food Pantry Update

- Remembering: Professor Reinhard Wittke and Dr. Regina Sallee Williams
- Health and Safety Reminder

### Forensics Team Finishes Fifth in Nation, Student Wins National Championship

The Eastern Michigan University forensics team continued its tradition of excellence this past weekend, [winning an individual national championship and finishing fifth overall in the nation](#) in the National Forensics Association (NFA) Tournament.

Osade Imalele, a marketing major who's also studying apparel, textiles and merchandising, led the exceptional showing as she earned a national championship in Persuasive Speaking. Osade, who resides in Northville, was born and raised in Detroit and is a first-generation Nigerian American. Osade is a senior in the Honors Program. She is graduating in December and plans to work in creative design at a fashion or art-focused company.

Other excellent performances included:

- Samira Taylor and Cedrick Charles earned fourth place in Duo Interpretation.
- Samira Taylor took fifth place in Poetry Interpretation.
- Auryon Azar took sixth place in Impromptu Speaking.
- Samira Taylor earned sixth place in Dramatic Interpretation.
- Basra Keynan took fourth place in Novice Persuasion.

At this year's tournament, held virtually, EMU finished ahead of such nationally known universities as Northwestern, Yale, Alabama, and Cornell. Eastern's teams have placed in the top 15 nationally for more than 40 years and have won more than 40 Michigan state team championships.

Special congratulations to Director of Forensics, Patrick Seick, and Professor Kathy Stacey, director of the School of Communications, Media and Theatre Arts.

### Professor's Campus Kindness Project Subject of Documentary

Professor Lolita Cummings and her random acts of kindness social media project, #CampusKindness, are getting some much deserved attention. A new documentary, "The LifeChangers: A Tale of Two Educators," features Professor Cummings and the kindness project she launched in her public relations class in 2018. The campaign was designed to positively address negativity and concerns over acts of hate and racism in our society. The project was embraced by many people across campus and soon became widespread under the CampusKindness hashtag. Other universities have started their own similar campaigns.

“The LifeChangers: A Tale of Two Educators,” follows a day in the life of Professor Cummings, as well as Detroit Public School Teacher, Michele Pizzo, who piloted a home visit program with students at Davison Elementary-Middle School.

The red carpet online premiere of the documentary will take place on Facebook Live this Sunday, April 25, from 7 - 8 p.m. The full event details can be found on the [Facebook event page](#).

## New “Gaming Ring of Honor” Award Established

Along with the University’s esports partner Gen.G., we created a new annual award to celebrate Eastern graduates who have gone on to do great things in the technology, gaming, and/or esports industries. The new award is called the “Eastern Michigan Gaming Ring of Honor.”

We are pleased to announce that Kyle Ellicott, a 2007 computer science graduate, was selected as the inaugural winner of the award as a result of his extensive accomplishments in the technology sector. He is the [Co-Founder/Principal Blockchain Analyst at Topio Networks](#), and the Co-Founder/Chief Labs Officer of ReadWrite Labs. Kyle is a noted global speaker, consultant, published author, and technologist with more than 15 years of experience at the cornerstone of digital transformation between industry and technology.

Dr. Connie Ruhl-Smith and I had the great pleasure of surprising Kyle with the award earlier this month. I hope you enjoy this [video of the surprise](#) as much as Connie and I enjoyed presenting it!

## COVID-19 Vaccinations

Vaccine availability is now open to everyone over the age of 16. As the semester comes to a close, I strongly encourage every member of the campus community to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

It is both quick and easy to schedule a vaccination. If you live and work in Washtenaw County, you can learn more about the vaccination and, in turn, register on the [Washtenaw County Health Department site](#). You also can seek a vaccination through your primary health care provider, or many pharmacies in the area, including:

- [Kroger](#)
- [Meijer](#)
- [Rite Aid](#)
- Walgreens

Rite Aid Pharmacy and Ypsilanti Township are offering COVID-19 vaccination appointments at the Ypsilanti Township Recreation Center on Saturday, April 24, and Saturday, May 1 (these dates are both for first dose appointments only). [Click here to schedule your appointment.](#)

The [VaccineFinder website](#) can help you find a location anywhere in the state or nation.

The number of individuals receiving vaccines in our area continues to increase. As of April 20, Washtenaw County reported 82% of residents 65 or older had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. For residents 16 and over, 53.5% had received at least one dose – up from 48.2% the week before. The data are being refreshed regularly. Visit the [WCHD vaccination tracking site](#) for ongoing updates.

As of April 21 across the state of Michigan, 46.1% of residents have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, with 32.2% reported as completing the vaccine protocol. Details, as well as a county-by-county breakout, can be found on the [Michigan vaccine dashboard](#).

## COVID-19 Dashboard

In the seven days ending April 20, the University administered 981 COVID-19 tests that resulted in 7 positive cases, for a positivity rate of 0.71%. We confirmed a total of 16 positive cases during this period. This is a significant decline from the 66 total cases reported last week. The decline is due to the University's concerted efforts throughout the pandemic to:

- Conduct detailed contact tracing;
- Isolate and quarantine those who might have been exposed to the virus;
- Establish and broadly promote a robust on-campus testing program;
- Offer direct one-on-one health consultation through the work of our Telehealth operation; and,
- Encourage vaccinations with the collaboration of the Washtenaw County Health Department and St. Joseph Mercy Ann Arbor to make our Convocation Center a primary community resource in mass vaccination efforts.

Of the 16 cases reported this week, seven were students who live off-campus and had no contact with campus prior to the time they tested positive and six 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. Among University employees, three cases were reported.

Since Aug. 12, the University has administered a total of 34,682 tests with 387 positive results for an overall positivity rate of 1.12% -- considerably lower than state and national tracking. Complete details can be found on the [University's COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

## Free COVID-19 Testing Schedule Next Week

Free COVID-19 testing will continue at the Student Center next week. The hours are:

Monday, April 26: Noon – 4 p.m.

Tuesday, April 27: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

You do not need to have symptoms or concerns that you have been exposed to the virus in order to be tested. All students, faculty and staff are encouraged to get tested, and to test frequently, regardless of how you feel. The testing process is fast and easy; results are provided within a matter of hours. You must register in advance; on-site registration is not permitted. Please visit [emich.edu/covid-testing](https://emich.edu/covid-testing) to complete your profile and reserve a time.

[Visit the testing FAQ](#) if you have additional questions.

## Participate in Denim Day to Support Sexual Assault Awareness Month

The Eastern Michigan University Department of Public Safety is actively supporting Denim Day. I strongly encourage all community members to support this international campaign. Denim Day takes place on Wednesday, April 28. It is an annual campaign in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Denim Day was founded 22 years ago following a ruling by the Italian Supreme Court in which a rape conviction was overturned because the justices felt that because the survivor was wearing tight jeans she must have helped the person who raped her remove her jeans, thereby implying consent. The following day, women members of the Italian Parliament wore jeans (to work) in solidarity with the victim.

Since then, what began as a local effort to bring awareness to victim blaming and destructive myths that surround sexual violence has become an international campaign. For more information about the campaign, please visit the [Denim Day website](#) or contact EMU Police Community Relations Officer Cathy Wilman at [734.487.0987](tel:734.487.0987), or by email at [cgeyer@emich.edu](mailto:cgeyer@emich.edu).

If you or someone you know has been sexual assaulted, please know that you are not alone. Survivors of sexual assault are encouraged to [contact the University's Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\) office](#), which is dedicated to addressing the mental health needs of students with free, confidential counseling.

Anyone who has information or wishes to report an incident of sexual assault or misconduct is encouraged to contact EMU Police at [734-487-1222](tel:734-487-1222) or [dps\\_questions@emich.edu](mailto:dps_questions@emich.edu), or the [EMU Title IX Office](#).

## Swoop's Food Pantry Closed Next Week

The Food Pantry will be closed the week of April 26-30 and will reopen Monday, May 3. Anyone in need of food during the closure is encouraged to visit the [Food Gatherers website](#) for information about local food pantries.

When Swoop's reopens on May 3, the most needed items will be notebooks, cereal, rice, dry dog food and mayonnaise.

During the closure, [monetary contributions can still be made online](#).

## Remembering: Professor Reinhard Wittke and Dr. Regina Sallee Williams

As we close this week's message, I would like to pay tribute to two distinguished academic leaders who, in their own ways, played instrumental roles in the University's growth.

Professor Reinhard Wittke was a true leader in internationalizing Eastern Michigan University and a faculty member in the history department from 1956-1990. He passed away earlier this week at the age of 100.

Professor Wittke established Eastern's European Travel Study Program, which later became International Studies. In 1960, under the title of "The Clinical Approach to History," Dr. Wittke began the travel program to Europe with an average of 30 students, mixing travel and lectures throughout.

After joining Professor Wittke and students on a visit to Munich, Germany in 1977, then University President James Brickley wrote, "I have told many people here at the University that to listen to a lecture by Dr. Wittke on the unification ... of Europe while standing in downtown Munich is an unforgettable experience." Wittke led 47 tours, and while most tours were to Europe, he also led tours to Australia, China and New Zealand.

For those of you with a deeper appetite for history and the legacy of Professor Wittke, please take time to read this [Eastern magazine article from Fall 2017](#). I also encourage you to listen to his lecture from the University Archives: [1963 lecture: A German Problem](#). Further details about [Professor Wittke's life and legacy can be found in this remembrance](#).

We just learned of the passing of Dr. Regina Sallee Williams, who served as head of Eastern's School of Nursing from 1990 until her retirement in 2001. She died April 12 at the age of 89. She was instrumental in the growth and development of the Nursing program during her time at the University. Her nursing career spanned more than 50 years.

Further information about Dr. Regina Sallee Williams can be found in this [Detroit News obituary](#).

Our sympathies go out to their families, friends, associates, and the many people whose lives they touched.

#### 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 when 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.

Wishing you a safe and peaceful weekend.

James Smith, Ph.D.