November 11, 2020 – Campuswide email

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

I began last week’s message by referencing light emerging at the end of this term’s tunnel, and as the countdown continues, things continue to look bright overall. That said, every day will remain a challenge, and our recent uptick in positive cases makes this point. As I’ve said repeatedly, we walk a fine line during this world pandemic that requires our focus and attention at all times.

Although all 244 student surveillance tests from this Monday came back negative in today’s report (good news!), it may be helpful to share a few considerations related to the uptick of 12 positive cases during the prior week, which were unrelated to our move to Phase 3 that was announced late last week.

While respecting each other’s privacy, I can note that most of the cases were related to what we have called “neighborhoods”; that is, the positive cases were relatively isolated to three campus groups that interacted closely in their housing or social situations. As well, most cases resulted from symptomatic testing and did not come out through our surveillance testing process, which tends to identify asymptomatic cases. We will continue to see positive cases on campus until we have a vaccine, and we had one more positive, symptomatic case today. Fortunately, to date these have been quickly managed by Jamey Gay and his colleagues in athletics who conduct our contact tracing, taking every precaution in the interest of health and safety.

The fact remains that wearing masks, not gathering in groups, keeping a healthy distance from each other, washing your hands, and not traveling are tactics that work to combat the spread of the virus.

Of course, what is happening on campus occurs against the backdrop of a concerning rise in case numbers nationwide, here in Kentucky, and in our own and adjacent counties. We remain a relatively positive example of containment, however, since our cumulative positivity case rate remains under 1 percent, currently at 0.54 percent campus wide and 0.70 for students. To date, we have administered 7,925 tests as part of our rigorous protocol. Given its success, we will be continuing this once everyone returns in January and on into spring.
As we’ve shown, it is possible to conduct in-person living and learning successfully during a pandemic, and we have a proven game plan to guide us until a vaccine or vaccines become readily available, something I know we are following closely.

Finally, Kathy Jones informs me that while the first three student exit testing dates of November 20, 23, and 24 filled up quickly, appointments remain available for the additional date of November 19, and we have arranged to increase spots into the evening as needed.

The end is near! Be safe the rest of this week and into the weekend, and all best wishes for completing the work that remains.

Sincerely,
Milton