March 12, 2021 – Campuswide email

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

We have made it to another Friday. Five weeks into the spring semester, we are pushing ever closer to a time when we can all be vaccinated.

I need to begin this message with a pandemic update, however. And, I must say, I can’t wait until the day when this is not the first item we need to discuss. Since my COVID ALERT message went out on Tuesday, we have had several additional cases, pushing our 7-day cumulative positivity rate to its highest point this year. We must act with an overabundance of caution in the face of this situation to reduce the campus infection rate or we will be faced with some difficult situations.

An essential part of this monitoring involves increased testing of 100 percent of students for the foreseeable future. Complying with testing protocols is a key element of the social contract and must be followed very strictly, particularly at this time. We need renewed attention and focus over the next two months to complete this very challenging year with the level of success I know we are capable of achieving.

Fortunately, all faculty and staff tests this week have come back negative, and responses to a recent survey indicate that nearly 70 employees have already been fully vaccinated. Anecdotally, I am hearing that an even higher number have received their first dose or are scheduled to receive the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine in the coming week. According to this pattern, we should have a high percentage of faculty and staff fully vaccinated even before the end of March. Dina and I were grateful to each receive our first vaccine dose last week.

President Biden’s announcement last night directing states to begin offering vaccines for all adults 18 or older by May 1 provides additional hope for our entire campus community. We will continue to monitor these developments closely and work with our local and state health officials to understand a likely timetable for Kentucky that could involve our students.

With more vaccines becoming available, there is increased hope that we will be in-person for this year’s Commencement and for all of our next academic year. Both have been key topics of conversation these past weeks, and we plan to have more announcements about our plans next week.
I want to conclude by updating you on our ongoing conversations about the Confederate monument in the cemetery adjacent to campus. I met this week with a remarkable group of student leaders who have been working on this important issue for the past five months, studying the history, talking with key constituents, providing information for others to explore the issues, and taking action to activate the removal process. We will continue to work together with this dedicated group – and other students, faculty and staff – as we engage the church (and if needed, the city) to encourage a rapid outcome. We support the church’s decision to move the monument and will work with their leadership to insure the monument is relocated. I will keep everyone updated on progress, and I will continue to meet with any interested students, faculty, and staff to discuss this important initiative.

Spring is trying to make an appearance, and the buds and blossoms we’re starting to see are all positive and promising signs of hope. With all that this season represents, let’s use it as our inspiration to stay focused on our collective goals as a learning community and do all we can to remain safe and healthy.

Sincerely,
Milton