February 26, 2021 – Campuswide email

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

It's almost hard to imagine that we were recently digging out from snow and ice after being battered with three successive winter storms in a short period of time. I remain grateful for the outstanding support from many corners of the campus to maintain critical services during the storms. To be even better equipped when we find ourselves in a similar situation in the future, we have done a thorough review to assess our hazardous weather protocols and prepare for the challenges we will face in the coming years.

Our culture of learning and mutual support was the key focus of the several Black History Month events held this week, organized by our Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Tuesday's event with alumni and students, in conjunction with Grace Doherty Library staff, helped us better understand our past as we keep improving our future. And Wednesday's YouTube Live event with Stacey Abrams, Dr. Andrea Abrams, and Johanna Marcellon offered inspiring ways to look to the future with determination as leaders and thought leaders (a recording of the event is available [HERE](#)). My congratulations to the ODI team led by Andrea Abrams, as well as Carrie Frey and her library colleagues.

We remain on high-alert with the likelihood that the COVID-19 virus will start spreading more rapidly in the U.S., with different variations beginning to appear on college campuses like ours, yet our recent test results have shown a very low positivity rate on campus in the past two weeks. These results give the Health and Safety Committee more confidence to reduce our testing protocols by half starting next Monday. We need to work very hard, however, to continue to be committed to our COVID social contract and keep each other safe this semester. NCAA testing protocols remain different for our student-athletes. With athletics, we were pleased to see that there were no positive COVID tests last week across all teams in the SAA conference.

We know vaccinations will be a part of our ongoing process of dealing with and recovering from the pandemic. Fortunately, more doses are headed to Kentucky. Gov. Andy Beshear has now opened up vaccination to people in Phase 1C, beginning next week, though he has maintained his plan to prioritize based on age. Nonetheless, just as many of you have signed up at UK, Ephraim McDowell, or via options through Kroger, Walmart, and Walgreens, I’d strongly suggest that those who intend to be vaccinated sign up through the statewide site.
Because we are hearing good news about appointments being made through Walgreens, their site is worth visiting, too. Each can be found here:

- https://govstatus.egov.com/kentucky-vaccine-survey
- https://www.walgreens.com/topic/promotion/covid-vaccine.jsp

Two final points.

We are still focused on planning for a variety of parent and family visit opportunities later this spring, phased in over time. While it’s still too early to make any announcements, please know that this is being discussed by the relevant campus committees. Related, our Commencement Committee has been meeting to consider multiple scenarios for a variety of situations in May to celebrate our graduates on their significant accomplishments. Since health and safety protocols in May are hard to predict, we want to be prepared for a number of possibilities, and we continue to prioritize the potential that we can have ceremonies and celebrations together on campus.

Lastly, strategic planning continues to move forward, and we will soon announce several Zoom forums and campus surveys to involve as many voices as possible. The initial forum will provide an opportunity to hear from our consultants at the Art & Science Group. Subsequent meetings will focus on what we are finding to be “cross-over” ideas among the seven pillars or subcommittees. Again, all related information can be found on our dedicated web page HERE.

Stay safe and healthy, and please think of the health of others and yourself as you make good decisions that will maintain our record of success dealing with the global pandemic. Each day brings us a little further on our journey toward beating this virus.

Sincerely,

Milton