

Safe on Campus

Dear Colleagues,

On June 19, the Administrative Committee (AC) announced a decision to invite all students to return to the College for the Fall 2020 term. Students not choosing to return will have the opportunity to continue their academic progress by taking online courses or taking a leave for the fall term. Giving students these choices seemed prudent in the effort to support them to the best of Berea's ability.

The primary rationale for this decision is the well-being of our students. Many found the challenges of continuing their course work from home or wherever they had gone to be quite difficult and, in some cases, overwhelming. Those challenges will remain for the students who elect not to return, but for those students who choose to come back to campus, the facilities and the learning environment of the campus will be more conducive to their success even if some course work is online. For those reasons, the AC concluded that the best way forward would be to bring back as many students who desired to return, as opposed to bringing, for example, only first-year students, perhaps including some upper-class students who were in special academic or personal situations.

Members of the AC reviewed student surveys carefully, which confirmed that remote learning away from campus was difficult for many students. We also learned from the faculty survey that the majority of faculty supported bringing back as many students as possible, from the perspectives of both the efficacy of learning and safety.

Unlike many tuition-dependent institutions, there are no significant financial ramifications for the College with respect to this decision. In fact, for the duration of the public health emergency, it will likely be slightly more expensive for the College to operate in person than it would be to continue operating fully online, because we anticipate the need for additional staffing in Student Life and some other areas in order to enforce the requirements that will help minimize the risk of contagion.

The purpose of this document, then, is to share the rationale developed by the AC to support operating as safely as possible.

Overall Framework

While COVID-19 is extant and circulating in the population and in advance of the availability of a safe and effective vaccine, there is no way of eliminating all risk of someone falling ill. This is certainly the case for our students whether they are at home or on campus. The administration learned of four cases of positive tests among Berea's dispersed students occurring after we closed the campus in March, and likely there could be more. We are also aware of at least one staff member and one contractor on campus who tested positive. On the level of the order of magnitude, about 1 in 150 Americans overall have tested positive so far. Four out of 1,600

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students represents about 1 in 400, so not too different, especially since in the age group of our students, many cases likely go undiagnosed because of asymptomatic infection.

On one hand, the reality is that there have been some cases among our community of Bereans, and this will continue no matter what the College does. On the other hand, there is an undeniable advantage to the learning of current and new students if Berea is able to operate as closely as possible to maintaining its proven model as a learning community in residence. Students will progress in their transformative academic experience because of all the things that this model provides our students.

Given that it is not possible to completely eliminate risk, our frame is to seek to gain the advantages to our students of opening for on-campus instruction, while operating in a way that minimizes the risk of an outbreak. We have also planned for how we will quarantine or isolate students, should cases occur, and we have worked with the Madison County Health Department to arrange for contact tracing, as required by the Commonwealth.

Of course, the wellbeing of our employees also matters greatly, so along with the decision to open, we are offering as much accommodation as possible to those who are at significant risk or who feel it prudent not to expose themselves.

Finally, some may be concerned about the broader community of Berea, and for that reason, we consulted with Mayor Bruce Fraley very recently. He reported that he had not heard expressions from Berea residents and businesspersons either in favor of Berea College opening for the fall or not. He did agree that the two most important factors are the possibility of bringing new cases into our community, thus putting residents at risk; and the undeniable positive advantage it would be for the economy of the city and its small businesses, many of which are at significant risk of failure. It turns out, of course, that those same factors come into play in the city's decisions around continuing to enhance travel and tourism, and that effort persists unabated.

Overall Strategy

In this section, we outline the main elements to which we have committed in order to reduce the likelihood of cases occurring on campus:

- Test all students before and upon arrival to the College to ensure that we start the semester COVID-19-free on campus.
- To limit the possibility of introducing the virus into the campus community, impose strict limits on students leaving campus and returning. This will include stringent control of use of personal automobiles.
- Put in place strict measures to limit the possibility of spread of contagion, including:
 - Provision of all necessary PPE by the College;
 - Required masks everywhere, except in private offices, student residence hall rooms, and Dining Services while eating;
 - Reduced class sizes and density in classrooms;

- No visitation in residence halls;
- Adjustment of all extra-curricular experiences to enhance safety, which will mean temporary elimination of some treasured parts of the Berea College experience;
- Required daily temperature checks of students and employees;
- Individual responsibility for surface sanitization in shared spaces like classrooms and residence hall restrooms, even though experts now suggest that most transmission is via aerosol pathways;
- Strict social distancing; and
- Timed entry to Dining Services.^[1]_{SEP}

Should these measures be successfully implemented and followed, there should be very limited spread, if any, if a student or employee falls ill. The goal on the student side is that only the student's roommate would need to be isolated, as the ill student needs to be quarantined.

Enforcement will need to be much more vigorous and expeditious than we are accustomed to. We will be streamlining the usual student disciplinary processes. One violation of the car policy, for example, will result in immediate suspension, and two significant behavior violations will as well.

Academic calendar adjustments have been designed to:

- reduce the number of contacts each person has on a weekly basis;
- limit the opportunity for students to travel home and back; and
- allow us to change course with less disruption at the mid-point of the semester, if that becomes necessary.

Compliance

We are, of course, dealing with 18–21-year-olds. They are delightful but can be known for a cavalier attitude when it comes to risky behavior and for their resistance to any rules, even those they know are for their own good.

Each student choosing to return will do so on the basis of complete information about the nature of the experience and will have affirmed, in advance and by their signature, that they are willing to abide by the rules and restrictions to be imposed. They will also know in advance that there will be no reluctance to enforce those expectations through immediate suspension, and a suspended student will not be permitted to continue studying online for the term.

We know, of course, that every student has one or more champions among the faculty and staff. We will need your support for the extraordinary measures being implemented. Interventions in favor of individual students who have violated new rules and restrictions will not be helpful.

Finally, the worst challenge to student compliance would be if faculty and staff do not comply with the various standards that will be in place for the whole community. For that reason,

employee behavior on campus will also be subject to stringent enforcement with measures, including, but not limited to, unpaid short-term suspensions if warnings do not suffice.

The above represents a short summary of our planning and thinking. We look forward to welcoming Berea students back to campus for what will be a different, but still transformative experience—one made possible by your support. We are aware, too, that we will not have thought of everything, and we welcome communications providing other ideas or things for us to consider.

Lyle Roelofs, President
For the Administrative Committee