

March 12, 2021

To the University Community:

A year ago this week the COVID-19 pandemic arrived at our doorstep. When I sent my message announcing that face-to-face instruction would be suspended, I genuinely believed that the disruption would be measured in weeks, not months, and now years. Sadly, this wouldn't be the last time that I was overly optimistic about what this virus had in store for us. Still, I remain an optimist at heart and would like to take a moment to share some good news.

While acknowledging that this pandemic has never allowed for a clear crystal ball into the future, it seems that we are turning a positive corner. I base this message on data, not just hope. We are currently at the midpoint of the semester and as I write this message our total number of positive student cases is 61. This represents a 44% decrease in cumulative cases at the same point of the fall semester. This result is especially impressive because we have instituted asymptomatic testing on campus, which should have driven our positive numbers higher. On the staff and faculty side of the house, we haven't even hit double digits this semester as only five cumulative cases have been reported.

Thank you to everyone in our community for taking risk mitigation seriously. It genuinely seems to be working. Still make no mistake, the pandemic is not over. We must continue to take every step in keeping it at bay.

We recently shared our plans that the fall 2021 semester will have a more traditional look in terms of the number of face-to-face classes offered, cocurricular activities available, and spectators' ability to attend sporting events. In addition, on-campus residents will largely return to pre-pandemic levels. In order to help make this a reality, I encourage everyone in our community to get vaccinated as soon as it is available to them. Let's recommit ourselves to staying even safer for the remainder of this semester and beyond.

As I have throughout the pandemic, I encourage you to follow the best scientific information currently available. Please continue to practice physical distancing, wear a mask, clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, and stay home if you are sick. And again, please get vaccinated as soon as you can. While things seem to be looking better, the pandemic isn't over yet and we must remain vigilant of our mitigation efforts so that our fall plans can become a reality.

Thank you,

William J. Behre
President