



TO: University of Idaho Parents and Families
FROM: Blaine Eckles, Dean of Students & Vice Provost for Student Affairs
DATE: Sept. 16, 2020
SUBJECT: Fall Semester Update

Hello Vandal Families!

I hope this communication finds you and your family doing well. I wanted to provide you with an update on the Fall semester and how things are progressing at the University of Idaho.

COVID-19 Update

We have seen tremendous response from students actively engaged in the [Healthy Vandal Pledge](#). It is very inspiring to see so many students wearing face coverings on campus, regularly using the hand sanitizers and maintaining social distancing when around others. They are doing great and you should be as proud of their collective efforts as I am!

This effort is resulting in great learning environments and a low positive rate for the coronavirus. As of this communication, **the positivity rate for the virus is 1.11%**. That is fantastic and speaks to the great work the students are doing engaging in healthy behaviors. But, as I recently communicated to some students, we still have several weeks of instruction before Fall break and thus we still have work to do. You can find COVID-19 positive rates (which are posted weekly) and many campus communications and various information on the [COVID-19 website](#).

We began surveillance testing for COVID-19 after completing testing of all students on the Moscow campus for the Fall semester. Random samples from students and employees will be collected weekly to help

monitor the campus environment. We will continue to do this random sampling through the semester to help us determine rates of infection within our community.

A team of U of I researchers worked this summer to develop methods of testing wastewater for coronavirus. Prior to Labor Day, they sampled eight specific locations on campus and results showed evidence of the virus in two areas within the residence halls. While we expected to find some level of the virus due to prior-known positives (those who had the virus earlier this year), out of an abundance of caution we tested all students in those two residence hall areas. That testing began last week and results have shown six new positive cases, or a rate of about 1%. We are working closely with those students, providing them support as they isolate and recover.

For questions about our COVID-19 practices, please review the [COVID-19 website](#) or email covid19questions@uidaho.edu.

Lots to Do on Campus

A few families have asked how classes are going, and I am pleased to report that things are going very well. Students have shared on many different occasions that they are happy to be back on campus and in the classroom. Faculty have also shared their enjoyment of having students in the classroom.

I receive inquiries about “What is there to do?” In short, there is a lot to do! While social distancing curbed some events and activities, there are still many things to do in person. A few things we have done to start the semester include:

- **Screen on the Green** — Outdoor movies on the Tower Lawn, allowing students to enjoy this great late summer weather in a fun movie-watching environment
- **Trivia Nights**
- **Whiffle Ball Home Run Derby** — Students competed to see how far they could hit a whiffle ball
- **Residence Life Photo Scavenger Hunt**
- **Welcome Back Picnic Socials** — Many colleges had socially-distanced yet engaging welcome back gatherings where students

learned about clubs and organizations within their college. Some are yet to come!

- **Drive-In Movies**
- **Miniature Golf at Campus Recreation**
- **[Palousafest Deconstructed](#)** — An opportunity for your student to connect with over 200 student clubs and organizations, with social distancing parameters in place, to learn how they can get involved on campus.
- **Paint Night with Wild at Art** — A favorite event on campus, we brought students together for a mass painting experience.



Students participating in Paint the Night programming with Wild at Art, Sept. 10, 2020.

These are just a few examples of events on campus and we'll have many more! The start of the semester can feel overwhelming for a student as they look for ways to engage. There is a LOT that can be done outside of the classroom setting, but your student needs to seek out things to do and be willing to try something new. Feel free to direct your student to the [Department of Student Involvement](#) in the ISUB where they will help your student learn about the more than 200 student clubs and organizations they can get involved with on campus, as well as the many upcoming events.

Support for Your Student

In a few short weeks, you will hear from your student about mid-terms and for some, increased stress about academics and how the semester is going. Your student is not alone, and we can help if they are struggling. Let us know by filing a [VandalCARE report](#). We will readily reach out to them and connect them with great campus resources such as the [Counseling & Testing Center](#) or [Women's Center](#). And as a reminder to you, we have the [Vandal Health Clinic](#) located right in the middle of campus for your student to visit if they feel ill or want to visit with a medical practitioner. And, don't forget to direct them to the great [Academic Support Services](#) for those who are having a difficult time navigating the academic challenges in front of them.

This is a difficult time for many, but your student has the ability to succeed. Please continue encouraging them to engage with campus offices for support, stay focused on their academics and continue upholding the Healthy Vandal Pledge. Often, your nudge may be just what is needed to keep them on the path toward success.

My best to you for a healthy, safe and successful Fall semester.

Go Vandals!

Blaine Eckles

Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students

deanofstudents@uidaho.edu

uidaho.edu/dean-of-students

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