

January 17, 2021

Colleagues,

Happy New Year! I hope this message finds you doing well and that you had a wonderful holiday break.

I also hope you have a moment today to reflect on Martin Luther King, Jr. and his enduring contribution to the cause of social justice in our country. Each year on this day I make it a point to reread his, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" of April 16, 1963.

(<https://abacus.bates.edu/admin/offices/dos/mlk/letter.html>) There is a line in that letter to his fellow clergy where Dr. King explains he is in Birmingham because, "...injustice is here." I've always thought that sentence served as a powerful call to action to confront injustice wherever we find it. Perhaps you have a favorite of his works. Please do share!

The purpose of this message, beyond sharing a bit about Dr. King, is to update you on some of the measures we are taking vis-vis COVID-19 - Omicron Variance. As always, if there are any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

The following policies have been approved by President Perkins and the Senior Team effective immediately:

- **Mask Mandate:** New England College is extending the indoor mask mandate through the end of Spring Break on Sunday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022. At that time we will evaluate whether or not an additional extension is warranted.
- **Fully Vaccinated Definition:** The College is updating the definition of fully vaccinated to include the booster vaccine. All students are expected to be fully vaccinated, including the booster, by Sunday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Faculty and Staff are also expected to be boosted. Details for employees will be provided by Human Resources. Please follow CDC guidelines based on your particular vaccine for the appropriate timing of booster shots.
- **Remote Status:** The College will remain remote until Monday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Classes will begin remotely for the first two weeks of the term. Our goal remains to return to face-to-face teaching and learning as soon as possible in a safe manner.
- **Founders Day:** Founders Day will be offered in a virtual format on Monday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022. More details will follow.
- **College Travel:** Employee travel will continue to be limited to essential business. Student travel will be limited to trips related to capstone/senior or otherwise required events for graduation. Questions about academic student travel should be directed to the appropriate associate deans. We are committed, for example, to hosting a live Senior Exhibition on our Manchester campus.
- **Vaccination Exemptions:** All exemption requests will be scrutinized closely and will require appropriate documentation.
- **Quarantine:** We will be amending our quarantine policies to align with the guidelines recently updated by the CDC and adopted by the State of New Hampshire. For example, the

- most significant change in policy allows students who are asymptomatic to return from quarantine after 5 days as opposed to the 10 day period set in prior guidance materials.
- **Testing:** All students will be required to provide a negative test taken within 3 days of arrival at the start of term. Students will also be tested on arrival. We will also once again employ surveillance sample testing of approximately 10% of our student body on a weekly basis. Any student who becomes symptomatic will also be tested.
  - **Remote Status:** All students have been informed on numerous occasions that January 24<sup>th</sup> is the deadline to declare remote status for the semester. Pat Corbett and Ian Harmon have taken lead on this effort and assure me we are set to honor this commitment to the faculty. We also, however, expect that given the expected cases tied to Omicron we will need to be flexible in accommodating temporary remote needs tied to infection and exposure.

Additional policy updates will be shared as needed. We are also working on updating our reporting process on the web to provide timely information about cases (current and total by term).

The Omicron variant has proven to be quite disruptive. I have shared with you that my goal has been to return to as close to normal as possible as quickly as possible while still being safe. We made significant progress last semester. We must remain vigilant and adapt to this variant which appears to spread at a much faster rate. We have taken the necessary steps and have spent the winter term planning for the challenges we expect to come at the start of term. Our ability to get to 'normal' depends on our students, our staff, and our faculty to continue the difficult work of navigating this pandemic.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or comments.

I wish you all the very best with the rest of the Winter Term and for a wonderful start to the Spring Semester.

Best wishes,

Dr. Wayne F. Lesperance, Jr.  
Provost  
New England College