



Office of the President
JOHN J. HURLEY

Dear Canisius Faculty and Staff,

I hope that the Christmas and New Year holidays were restful for you. Unfortunately, for those of us who were seeking a temporary escape from our Covid-driven world, the past few weeks have provided no respite. I am aware of several in our Canisius family who contracted the Omicron variant of Covid over the holidays. It is clear that we are dealing with something on a completely different level than what we have seen up to now.

The good news is that the experience across the United States (and the world, for that matter) appears to suggest that the Omicron variant is milder than the original Covid-19 virus and the Delta variant. The bad news is that Omicron may be as contagious as measles and continues to infect both vaccinated and unvaccinated persons, but the effects in vaccinated and boosted individuals is definitely milder.

Dr. Sara Morris and the deans, as well as the Human Resources staff, have been inundated with calls, emails and inquiries about Covid-related issues this week. At the top of the list is what the college intends to do about the start of the spring semester on January 18. I wanted to provide you with an overview of where we are with our current situation and our plans moving forward.

Vaccination Rates

- We have achieved a 99 percent vaccination rate among our faculty and staff as a result of the vaccine mandate that took effect on November 18. There is a very small number of exemptions and those receiving exemptions are subject to a weekly testing requirement.
- Among our students, we have a 92 percent vaccination rate, and we continue to work with students for whom we have not received any information, currently about 50 continuing students and approximately 20 new and transfer students. There are about 80 students who have been granted exemptions and they will be expected to test on a regular basis throughout the semester.
- The college was an early adopter on the return to the mask mandate, and I am convinced that it helped us keep the number of positive cases in the fall relatively low. As we know, indoor mask mandates remain in force throughout New York State, regardless of vaccination status.

Canisius has been following the recommendations of the CDC and the state, and in cases, going beyond them with its mask and vaccine mandates. In light of that, it does not seem reasonable for us to reinstitute a lockdown of the campus and a return to remote instruction. Dr. Leana Wen wrote in the *Washington Post* on Monday, “It’s unreasonable to ask vaccinated people to refrain from pre-pandemic activities. After all, the individual risk to them is low, and there is a steep price to keeping students out of school, shuttering restaurants and retail shops and stopping travel and commerce.”

Campus Plans and Safety Measures

1. We will start the spring semester as scheduled on January 18 with in-person instruction on the campus as we had planned. We make this decision mindful of concerns expressed by faculty and staff about the spread of Omicron and the possibility of outbreaks on the campus, but our high vaccination rate and the milder impact of Omicron coupled with the high priority that we place on in-person instruction outweigh the risks. Some have suggested a two-week remote instruction period to start the semester, which we have carefully considered and declined to adopt because there is no evidence that two weeks would be sufficient to deal with the current Omicron spike.
2. There is guidance that suggests we should be making wider use of KN95 or N95 masks, and we will both encourage it and purchase additional supplies of these more protective masks for distribution to the faculty and others in student-facing positions.
3. We will continue to encourage vaccinations and booster shots for all. Some schools have already adopted a booster shot mandate and some have suggested this for Canisius. The matter is under consideration at this point.
4. Dr. Morris and the deans will work with individual faculty on requests for alternative teaching arrangements, but I expect that these will be handled in a matter consistent with other legally required accommodations in the workplace. Specific procedures will be communicated by Dr. Morris and the deans early next week.
5. The college will follow New York State Department of Health guidelines for quarantining and isolation, which have been revised just this week. These new guidelines shorten the period for quarantining in certain cases and have different requirements depending on whether a person is vaccinated, boosted or unvaccinated. Our new protocols can be viewed on the attachment and will be accessible on the Covid-19 resources pages of the MyCanisius Portal and the college’s website. Human Resources will continue to work with you on individual questions and cases consistent with these guidelines.
6. We are taking steps to provide some reduction in density in some offices by relocating staff and allowing work at home where appropriate.

With our continued adherence to recommended mitigation strategies - mask-wearing, testing, vaccination and boosters, good hand-washing practices, physical distancing, and staying home if sick - we are all doing our part to care for ourselves and those around us.

I would urge you to read carefully forthcoming emails with guidance from Dr. Morris or Human Resources on additional details. The college's Recovery Task Force continues to meet weekly to develop recommendations and adjust plans as appropriate. I would caution you that these decisions, like every other decision we have made throughout this pandemic, are subject to constant review and reevaluation. Please try to stay flexible as the situation continues to evolve.

Thank you and Happy New Year.

Very truly yours,



John J. Hurley, President

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