



Office of the President
JOHN J. HURLEY

Dear Canisius Students and Families,

I hope that the semester break have been restful for you. Unfortunately, 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.

I know that you are concerned about our plans for the spring semester which is scheduled to start on January 18. Here is an overview of where we are with our current situation and our plans moving forward.

Vaccination Rates

- We have achieved a very high 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, as a result of the vaccine mandate we announced for the spring semester, we have likewise achieved a high vaccination rate. We continue to work with students for whom we have yet to receive vaccine information. There are a number of students who have been granted religious and medical 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 last August, 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 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 schools have decided to revert to remote learning for the first part of the semester, which we have carefully considered and declined to adopt because there is no evidence that this short period would be sufficient to deal with the current Omicron spike.
2. We will not be mandating a negative Covid test in order to return to campus. Our thought is that testing sites have been overwhelmed and this would impose a hardship on students and families without a significant benefit, given the spread of the Omicron variant.
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 the exception and will be handled in a matter consistent with other legally required accommodations in the workplace.
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. The college is currently updating our policies on quarantine and isolation consistent with this new guidance. Students will be receiving updated information from Dr. Sandra Estanek and the student affairs staff in the days ahead.
6. We are taking steps to provide some reduction in density in some offices around the college 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, 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 from Dr. Estanek that will contain updated guidance and 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.

I wish you much good health and happiness as we begin the New Year.

Very truly yours,



John J. Hurley, President

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