

Dear GCU students and families:

As we wrap up the final two weeks of the fall semester and begin looking ahead to spring 2021, we are greatly encouraged by the accomplishments that have taken place on GCU's campus -- both inside and outside the classroom -- during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an unprecedented time in our history and we couldn't be more proud of how the campus community has responded.

While many universities switched to all-remote academic models or suspended in-person instruction during the semester, GCU will complete the fall semester with its in-person blended learning model while still conducting structured on-campus social activities and maintaining residence hall living arrangements for 16,000 traditional students who chose to return to campus. Another 5,000 traditional ground students and 2,000 evening cohort students were able to utilize GCU's online expertise to complete their coursework in a remote learning environment during the semester.

The start of the spring semester will have a similar look and feel as we await details on the availability of a COVID-19 vaccine. **Important details on the spring semester schedule, including spring break, are listed below.**

ACADEMICS

GCU's faculty and deans have been pleased with the academic achievements of students in this challenging environment and are already refining course delivery for a few courses based on analyzing student data and the recommendations of faculty. This will further improve student outcomes within a blended learning environment next semester. For example, in many quantitative types of courses such as science, math and business, the blended instructional model will be structured next spring to provide students even more in-class engagement through video conferencing software with instructors.

We were also very pleased to see that physically distant classroom/laboratory settings with mandatory mask requirements were very successful in preventing coronavirus infections. Such settings were not key vectors in spreading COVID-19.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Chapel services. Bible studies. Men's and women's basketball games. Intramurals. Outdoor theater performances. Hanging of the Greens. Silent Disco. On-campus campouts. Welcome Week events. A Unity Walk. Club activities. ... Sure, they looked different in a physically distant COVID kind of way, but the important thing is that students were able to come together and interact in a controlled social environment.

It also proved to be a safe environment. By cross-referencing the list of students in attendance for ticketed events such as Chapel and basketball games against known positive coronavirus cases, it revealed that, due to the precautions taken, those gatherings did not contribute to additional COVID spread.

We know that students want social activities as part of their college experience. By maintaining those experiences in COVID-controlled on-campus settings, the hope is that students are less likely to seek social activities on their own off campus where precautions are not in place and exposure to the virus is much more likely. Spring semester activities are already in the planning stages.

Most importantly, those experiences continue to foster the sense of community, camaraderie and faith upon which GCU is built.

COVID CASES

There are currently 102 active coronavirus cases connected to campus (96 students and 6 employees) – which is about 1% of the student body -- and occupancy at GCU Hotel (isolation for positive cases) and Canyon Hall (quarantine) sits at about 25%.

Through contact tracing, we are able to determine that the bulk of positive COVID cases are the result of off-campus gatherings or friends congregating in residence halls without a mask and having less than six feet of physical distancing.

The number of positive cases in Arizona is increasing, as they are throughout most of the country, so it's a good reminder that students should continue to take steps to reduce the spread and protect the most vulnerable among us:

- Remain on campus as much as possible
- Maintain physical distancing of at least six feet
- Wear a mask in all indoor academic or community settings and outdoors when physical distancing is not possible
- Wash your hands frequently
- Be outdoors when possible
- Contact COVID Hotline (602-639-7300 option 2) if you come into contact with a positive case or test positive at an off-campus testing site.

SPRING SEMESTER PLANS

The spring semester will begin as previously announced and include additional time off during the semester, two weeks of online instruction near the end of the semester and a spring break week to conclude the spring term.

Classes will start as scheduled on Jan. 4, with the first week occurring online for most courses as spelled out in [this communication](#). Move-In will occur Jan. 2-10, providing students as much flexibility as possible while travelling back to campus during the holidays.

Three-day weekends will be incorporated into the schedule in January (MLK Day 1/18), February (Presidents Day 2/15), March (Spring weekend 3/19) and April (Good Friday 4/2) to provide students with breaks from their studies, while students will have the option to take a spring break if they desire at the end of the semester (April 19-25).

In-person instruction will end April 1 for about 80% of classes (exceptions being some programs in nursing, athletic training and senior-level engineering), followed by two weeks of online instruction April 5-16 and spring break April 19-25. The online classes will allow some students to return home early if they have summer employment or other opportunities. On-campus residents have the option of returning home or remaining in their dorms during the two weeks of online instruction and spring break. This includes graduating seniors, with commencement scheduled for April 19-20-21. Housing prices remain unchanged for the semester.

Unlike the Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks when students generally return home, students often visit warm-weather, densely populated areas during spring break. Pushing spring break to the final week allows students to take a trip if they desire while avoiding any possible post-spring break COVID outbreaks on campus.

The end of the spring term remains April 25.

Please reach out to your student services advisor for further clarification on whether your courses will switch to an online format April 5-16.

VACCINE

Arizona is expected to receive its first doses of a COVID-19 vaccine toward the end of December. Priority for the initial vaccine allocations will go toward first responders, health-care professionals, teachers and nursing homes.

Vaccine availability on a wider scale is not expected until sometime next spring or summer, but GCU is already taking steps by communicating with public health officials and acquiring freezers that are necessary to store the vaccine. More information on vaccine availability will be shared as soon as we have it.

AND FINALLY...

This successful fall semester could not have occurred without the contributions of countless faculty and staff members who ensured that we were well-prepared for these unprecedented challenges. Their dedication to the University and the students that we serve was extraordinary.

And it could not have occurred without you, our students. The compassion you exhibit toward fellow students and faculty members, your adherence to COVID protocols and your resiliency in the face of challenges are testaments to the grace our Christian community is known for.

For that, we thank all of you. We know it has not been easy.

Finally, our thoughts are with you as you prepare for final exams to finish out this most unusual of semesters. We pray you have a safe and joyous Christmas season as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. And we look forward to welcoming you back in January when, with God's guidance, we will continue to exhibit the strength and resiliency of the GCU Family.