

Dear Lewis & Clark Parents,

I hope this letter finds you well and your families healthy. I have run out of adjectives to attempt to describe the year 2020--unparalleled, unprecedented, remarkable, unusual, freakish, bizarre--nothing seems to really capture it. Through it all, our determination and singular focus on the health and welfare of our campus community has remained resolute. I will not sugarcoat it: it has been hard--but so worth it. Nothing has been business as usual--we changed many things in order to comply with the restrictions put forward by the State and in order to keep the community safe. Unlike many colleges and universities, we stated we would open with in-person classes and we have been able to do so. We sincerely hope this will continue, and if the first month is any indication, it definitely will.

So far, we have been able to keep our overall positivity rate of the virus extremely low: 0.05% per 1800 students tested at the time of this writing. Our success thus far can be attributed to our student body and LC community taking the prevention of the spread of the virus seriously, the planning and approach we have taken as an institution, and the relatively low frequency of the virus circulating in the State of Oregon. We also want to thank you for the steps you took as parents, in conjunction with your student, to make sure that your student was free of the virus before coming to school. So far so good.

Testing is not enough

Although we developed a comprehensive testing protocol, testing alone will not eliminate the spread of the virus. Given the fact that a vast majority of 18 to 22-year-olds tend to be asymptomatic in regard to COVID, it is important that we utilize approaches that allow us to surveil the community whether they are presenting symptoms or not. To do so, we are following the science and taking a careful approach to educating students about prevention techniques, as well as providing regular testing and random sampling as needed.

Wastewater (Effluent) Testing

Effluent sampling has been used for years to test for the presence of certain chemicals or particles in the wastewater of a community. Several schools, counties and states have now begun to utilize these techniques in order to monitor their residential communities for the presence of viral load. Wastewater testing or (effluent sampling) offers complementary advantages to clinical testing because it reflects the health at the community level, is not limited by clinical testing availability, and sheds light on both symptomatic and asymptomatic infections.

Our approach

We currently have 8 designated sample sites throughout our residence hall sewage system. Two times a week, our facilities staff collect the samples at each site and ship these samples to a lab at Oregon State University for processing. Twice weekly, a team of LC senior administrators and health staff gather to discuss the results. Our research partners at Clean Water Services here in Portland help us read and translate the results. When we note a trend (defined as two very strong positive markers in the

wastewater), we make a decision about the interventions that may be required. This usually includes placing that residence hall on a modified self-isolation. The students do not attend classes in person and limit their social interactions. They pick up their food in a designated dining hall away from other students. They can go outside, exercise, and interact with residents within their designated residence hall, until they have been tested and show a negative result. So a modified self-isolation is not as restrictive as self-isolation or quarantine. This often takes 2-3 days, mainly to stand up a testing clinic and to await the results of the COVID-19 tests from our outside lab partner. So far, when we have conducted the confirmatory COVID-19 tests, we have had all negative results.

Why would we have signals of positive viral load in the wastewater, yet not be able to detect any positive COVID cases among our students? Unfortunately, that is because there are many variables involved that potentially confound our results--some of which we cannot totally control. Did a student allow for an off-campus student to visit the infected residence hall and that person used the facility? Did our janitorial staff use the facility or some other outside person? Was the wastewater result a false positive reading? Was there an issue with the sample itself? Was the COVID PCR testing a false negative? As you can see, a variety of factors make this technique less than full proof. Regardless, we still feel the effluent testing is a useful tool in our tool belt. It is really the only approach available that provides a leading indicator of potential infection allowing us to quickly test students in the infected area and take the appropriate action.

Effluent testing is an emerging science. The application of effluent testing to epidemiology and public health is even more nascent. And the use of effluent testing in higher education is truly groundbreaking. All that is to say this: we're learning. With every set of samples taken and results analyzed, we're getting a better understanding of the benefits and limitations of effluent testing.

How can you help?

We encourage you to request that your student provide you with regular updates about our wastewater efforts and results. Rely on your student to inform you if they are in modified self-isolation, are required to be tested, and the status of their testing results. This will be much more timely and relevant than relying on the College to provide you with this information, and will allow the College to focus on providing services and information to our students.

Reinforce with your student that if and when they are in modified self-isolation, self-isolation, or quarantine, it is to ensure the health and safety of the community. Encourage them to follow the directives of the College, and to limit their social contacts and movements until they have a negative COVID test. And speaking about testing, encourage them to follow through on their expected responsibility to complete testing quickly and compliantly when we ask. Standing up a testing clinic is quite involved and expensive; doing so pulls our Health Service staff out of the normal Health Clinic in order to provide testing. We also must contract with outside temporary medical personnel in order to have enough professionals available for the testing. When a student misses their designated testing time, it is extremely disruptive. As a result, if they fail to get tested on the days when we have testing readily available, we will begin to pass the charges for testing on to the student. If they test on the day and time we ask them to, the College will pick up those testing costs.

You can always follow along and see how the community is doing by visiting our [Covid-19 Confirmed Status Report](#). There you will see data regarding the number of tests we have administered, the positivity rate of the community, and the actions taken by the College for confirmed cases. At the bottom of this webpage, you will also find the results of our effluent sampling. This page is updated every business day.

Upcoming issues and transitions

We fully expect that the bulk of our residential students will return home during the Thanksgiving holiday. This will help us to ensure that we do not have students on campus during December and into the winter break when the projected transmission of the virus might be higher. We will close the vast majority of the halls, and much of the campus will be closed as employees transition to primarily remote work. We will contact students in the upcoming weeks about the process of closing up their residence halls rooms to safely and efficiently transition out of their residences to return home for the winter months.

We will enthusiastically welcome students back the week of January 19th. Expect that we will require students to follow many of the same proven prevention methods they were asked to comply with during Fall move-in (self-isolating for 2 weeks prior to returning back to campus, complying with testing 5-7 days after returning, and following all of the health mitigation approaches they have been observing thus far. We will let students know about November move-out, the Spring calendar, expectations for reentry, and other relevant information in the upcoming weeks so that they and you can plan ahead.

We need to continue doing the right things in order to ensure our success. I am proud of our students and impressed with their efforts thus far. Thank you for all of your support and for your commitment to your student's academic journey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin H. Holmes-Sullivan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robin" being the most prominent.

Robin H. Holmes-Sullivan, Ph.D.
Vice President of Student Life
Lewis & Clark College