

**From:** [Summers, Greg](#)  
**Subject:** Academic Affairs Update, 08-07-20  
**Date:** Friday, August 07, 2020 8:16:51 AM  
**Attachments:** [RELEASE - UW System testing program includes more than 350,000 tests.pdf](#)

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Colleagues,

Today, I write with an update that is brief but important. For months now, we have worked on plans to keep our campus and community as safe as possible when in-person teaching resumes this fall. But with all our discussions of prevention—of face coverings, six feet of distancing, and deep cleaning—we have neglected to say something else that is obvious but vital to declare explicitly: we cannot and will not avoid having COVID on campus.

Although we know this in theory, during the past week, we got to live it in practice. One of the students attending the CNR summer field experience tested positive for the virus. This one case prompted lots of anxiety from students, parents, and staff members; lots of discussions about protocols for who to tell and how to tell it; and lots of worries about balancing confidentiality with need for transparency in a crisis.

A week later, we have learned from the experience and arrived at a good place, I hope, with our protocols. We will err on the side of transparency. When students or staff members test positive in the future—when, to be clear, not if—we will let the university community know with emails to the affected classes and units. It's important, though, for everyone to understand the continued need to respect people's confidentiality regarding their personal health and the awkward balance this will entail. If students receive an email that someone in their class has tested positive, we won't include names, but it may be obvious to everyone who we're referencing. If a faculty member needs to quarantine for two weeks and teach online instead of in-person, it won't be difficult to guess why. And yet, it's vital that we all work hard not to blur these ethical lines more than necessary.

This week, we got word that UW System has secured funding for a broad testing program on our campus this fall, including testing all students in the residence halls every two weeks. (See the attached announcement.) These tests are a welcome aid to mitigate risk. But as with all our efforts at prevention, it's important to repeat what I said above: this testing will not keep the virus from intruding on campus. Most of the tests we are receiving are antigen tests rather than the PCR variety. They provide quicker turn-around times but at the expense of much lower accuracy. This testing regimen will certainly help to identify infected students sooner than we might otherwise have done, but it's critical that we not assume a false sense of security, either.

My apologies if today's message seems pessimistic. The work we have all done to prepare has been extraordinary, and my hope remains that it will be effective. Nevertheless, I think it's

important that we are realistic as well, and that our preparations for confronting the virus on campus are equally thorough.

Take care. I'll have more to share next week.

Greg

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Greg Summers

Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs | [UW-Stevens Point](#)

202D Old Main | 2100 Main Street | Stevens Point, WI 54481

Phone: (715) 346-4686 | [gsummers@uwsp.edu](mailto:gsummers@uwsp.edu)



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