



Tuesday, October 6, 2020

## Dear Students, Families, and Faculty and Staff Colleagues,

I want to begin this message with a big “thank you” to you, our Zag students and families, as well as to our colleagues for extending grace and understanding as we continue to navigate this challenging fall semester. We shared in our messages over the summer that the fall semester would be undeniably atypical, and this has certainly proven to be the case. The restrictions in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 mean we are not able to have some of the same high-contact group experiences that we would in less challenging times. At the same time, in talking with students, there is clear evidence they are working hard to maintain their academic studies and a healthy attitude – and for that, we are grateful.

Now that we have moved completely through September and into October, I thought it would be important to provide some updates regarding our work to support members of the community who have contracted COVID-19, or been exposed to someone with it.

## Testing for COVID-19

As you know, we have been conducting testing for COVID-19 on campus since August 16th, with initial testing offered voluntarily for specific student populations and at move-in, as well as testing of randomly-selected students from both on- and off-campus. This approach has allowed us to identify (or confirm) 51 students who tested positive for the COVID-19 virus – many of whom were without symptoms (“asymptomatic”). We have been grateful for the involvement of our students in this effort. As of the conclusion of testing this past Friday (October 3), we have administered 5,034 tests, 808 in the last week alone.

## Tracking Confirmed Cases

As you are aware, we have been posting the number of students and employees with confirmed positive diagnosis of COVID-19 on our “dashboard” at <https://www.gonzaga.edu/zagon/covid-19-dashboard-testing-contact-tracing>. These data are updated each weekday evening at 5:00pm, with any confirmed cases occurring over the weekend posted the following Monday evening. These data are reported to and confirmed with the Spokane Regional Health District, as well. As of this morning, there are 11 currently positive cases of which we are aware: 6 involving students on-campus, 4 students off-campus, and one employee. Students who test positive are supported in moving into isolation space. *(Students who test positive and have symptoms may leave isolation after a period of 10 days **and** fever free without medication for 24 hours **and** symptoms improving. Those who test positive but are without symptoms may leave isolation after 10 days from the time of the COVID-19 test).*



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With every student who tests positive, there are inevitably a number of other individuals who have come into close and prolonged contact (within 6 feet for 15 minutes or greater) with that person. Frequently, these are other students with whom they live. It is an uncomfortable but necessary precaution that these students who are close contacts quarantine until COVID-19 testing can determine whether the individual being tested did, or did not, contract the virus. Due to the nature of COVID-19, and consistent with Center for Disease Control guidance, those who must quarantine are obligated to do so for a period (14 days), and it can be challenging to quarantine for so long – especially if it is ultimately determined that the person did not contract the virus.

Candidly, supporting students in quarantine is a greater challenge as the number of students in quarantine has risen. During the past two weeks, we have had days with as many as 70 on-campus students in one of our designated campus quarantine residences at one time, and as many as 20 students quarantining “in place.” (Students who live in apartment or suite-style residence halls may be permitted to quarantine in place if they have access to a private bedroom and private bathroom). Coordinating support, such as meal service, laundry and mail, as well as responding to any medical or other needs, has required the development of new systems and strategies, with a lot of trial-and-error and learning along the way.

To our students who have been placed into isolation or quarantine and have complied with our directions: thank you for working with us to make the best of this challenging situation. We know this experience has not always been smooth or easy, and we are grateful for your patience. Thanks as well to the faculty, staff, and Zag families who have reached out with questions and concerns, as well as words of support. Your feedback has been instrumental in the continued refinement of our processes and plans.

## **What Percentage of Students Who Are Quarantined Ultimately Test Positive for COVID-19?**

Of all students who have been asked to quarantine as a result of being in close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, about 20% have ultimately tested positive for the virus themselves. Quarantine is an essential practice to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This gives us a relatively high degree of confidence that, despite the need to take precautions in the event of a possible exposure, consistent practices to decrease transmission of the virus, such as wearing face coverings, washing hands frequently, and maintaining physical distance – are working.



## UPCOMING CHANGES & ADJUSTMENTS

As the members of our team work together with students and employees who have contracted COVID-19 or potentially been exposed to someone who has it, we are learning more about strategies to better support our community members. We will be providing additional information in the days to come, but a couple of specific examples are worth noting:

### **FOOD SERVICE & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES**

Having worked to support a significant number of students in quarantine and isolation, and having received feedback from them along the way, this week we are introducing some changes to food service options, and introducing a 14-day schedule of virtual activities (a mix of synchronous and self-guided) to engage students and help combat stress and anxiety, while building connection and care to support them during this experience. We have also developed a series of weekly outdoor structured activities (e.g., bingo, arts & crafts and Pilates), rolling out this week, which will allow students in quarantine and isolation to have some structured outdoor time following public health directives, including face coverings and physical distancing. Lastly, processes are now in place to allow students in quarantine and isolation to receive care packages. More information will be provided to our students and families this week.

As the weather becomes colder and options for outside dining decrease – but in an effort to support community dining experiences for our students – we are introducing some new seating configurations that allow for small group gatherings while working to further decrease potential transmission of the virus. These include additional Plexiglas partitions, and more seating in the Hemmingson Ballroom.

### **ANTIGEN-BASED TESTING**

We have engaged a company called Quidel to provide us with supplemental antigen-based testing capability, and will be re-focusing some of our random testing efforts on-campus to more regularly assess the status of each residence hall community. We want to do everything possible to pick up on incidence of COVID-19 as early as possible.



## WEEK RECAP

It is our goal to share frequent updates that include numbers of students placed in quarantine and isolation, explanation of process improvements, and FAQs developed from shared input. Here is a summary of activities from the past two weeks, for your information:

### 9/21 - 9/27

#### **Quarantine**

- Thirty-seven (37) students moved to quarantine residences
- Eleven (11) students directed to quarantine-in-place
- Eleven (11) students released from quarantine
- Ten (10) students released from quarantine-in-place status

#### **Isolation**

- Eighteen (18) students with positive test results moved to isolation residence
- One (1) student released after completing full isolation period
- Seven (7) symptomatic students released from isolation (tested negative)

### 9/28 - 10/5

#### **Quarantine**

- Five (5) students moved to quarantine residences
- Six (6) students directed to quarantine-in-place
- Forty-seven (47) students released from quarantine
- Eight (8) students released from quarantine-in-place status

#### **Isolation**

- Five (5) students with positive test results moved to isolation residence
- Twenty-two (22) students released after completing full isolation period
- Five (5) symptomatic students released from isolation (tested negative)



*Update from the Vice Provost for Student Affairs*

# MANAGING IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

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## Grateful for Our Students

To date, we have been able to keep the number of COVID-19 positive cases on our campus to a manageable level, and we want to be clear this is due in largest part to our students' acknowledgement of their role in keeping themselves and others safe. Without the efforts of our amazing students, we would not be where we are. We still have a long way to go this semester, and as the weather turns colder and more inclement, we cannot afford to let our guard down. We cannot stress enough how critical it is for students who have been asked to isolate or quarantine to fully cooperate and follow the public health guidelines that have been put into place. It is true that our quarantine and isolation processes place significant restrictions on what students are able to do, and while we do not like having to enforce these restrictions, they are necessary to keep members of our community safe and healthy and restrict the spread of the virus.

For additional information, including updates on testing and the number of COVID-19 positive cases, visit our website [www.gonzaga.edu/zagon](http://www.gonzaga.edu/zagon). Cumulative and active positive cases are updated at 5pm Monday-Friday on our COVID-19 Dashboard, and testing data is updated on a weekly basis each Monday. If you have questions, you can also call our COVID-19 hotline at (509) 313-7070.

Together, we Zag On.

Signed.

Dr. Kent Porterfield  
Vice Provost for Student Affairs