May 18, 2020

Dear Notre Dame Student:

A highlight in the life of any university is welcoming its newest members. I am delighted to welcome you to the Notre Dame community and I look forward to meeting you in person.

I write to share with you our current plans for the fall, as I know this is very much on your minds. As we think about the fall, we are committed to taking all reasonable steps to protect the health and safety of the campus community in the new normal brought on by the novel coronavirus. Within the bounds of health considerations, we want to welcome you to campus for in-person instruction and offer you the opportunity to enjoy as many aspects of undergraduate and graduate student life at Notre Dame as possible.

Recently, here in Indiana, Gov. Eric Holcomb announced that, barring any resurgence of the coronavirus, he expects to lift all restrictions associated with it on July 4. We are working with state and local officials to return to full operations on campus but doing so carefully and gradually. We want to be equipped to take the necessary steps to ensure your environment on campus is as safe as possible when you return. Working with faculty experts, an infectious disease specialist from Johns Hopkins and a team of physicians from the Cleveland Clinic, a special University working group is developing appropriate campus protocols. We are also working closely with state and local health officials. While we will continue to monitor developments through the summer, the outline below describes our current objectives.

**Fall Semester on Campus**

By far the most complex challenge before us is bringing our students to campus for the resumption of classes in the fall semester. Bringing everyone back is in effect assembling a small city of people from many parts of the nation and the world, who may bring with them pathogens to which they have been exposed. We recognize the challenge, but we believe it is one we can meet.

A major hurdle, of course, is to identify students who are carrying the novel coronavirus and prevent them from spreading it to others. We will institute a comprehensive testing protocol, and
we are developing plans to isolate those who test positive and quarantine those students who have come in close contact. We will continue a testing, contact tracing and quarantining protocol throughout the semester, acting aggressively to isolate or quarantine as necessary. We will also institute a number of other health and safety measures.

Some institutions are electing to reduce the number of students on campus by inviting only a portion of the student body at any time. We have resisted that course, because we believe in the educational value of the on-campus experience for all our students, and we recognize it is particularly valuable for students whose living situations away from campus may not be as conducive to study. We intend to bring all our students to campus for the semester, though we may stage your return to allow for testing and orientation. We believe that, with extensive protocols of testing, contact tracing and quarantining, coupled with preventive measures such as an emphasis on hand-washing and norms for social distancing and wearing masks in certain settings, we can keep our campus environment safe.

A particular epidemiological challenge for college campuses arises when students leave for breaks, are exposed to infectious agents, and return to campus and possibly spread infections to others. To minimize this possibility, we plan to begin classes during the week of August 10, continue through without a fall break and conclude the semester before Thanksgiving. More details about the schedule for the fall semester will be forthcoming from the Registrar’s Office.

We will, in addition to our testing, contact tracing, quarantining and preventive protocols for students, have parallel protocols for faculty and staff.

We realize, of course, that these adjustments will require flexibility and adaptation from all of us, and we thank you in advance for your patience and understanding.

**2020 Summer Session**

Given our focus on fully reopening for the fall semester, we cannot host many, if any, programs even during the second half of the summer session. We are considering options that will allow the return of a very small number of students in July, mainly those whose summer work is preparatory for the fall semester. Limiting the numbers of this group will allow us to devote time, energy and resources to reopening in the fall semester. The relevant offices will be in touch with you if you were planning to be on campus this summer.

**Research Labs, Studios and Libraries**

A Research Task Force is currently developing a plan for the safe and gradual re-opening of our campus research labs, studios and libraries in coming weeks. We expect a phased reactivation of the labs, studios and libraries in the coming weeks and months. An upcoming letter from Vice President
for Research Bob Bernhard to faculty and graduate students will provide greater detail around the re-opening of these facilities.

**Necessary Adaptations**

We must also be prepared for the possibility of an unexpected, severe new outbreak of COVID-19. If such an outbreak occurs, we may need to return to remote instruction. We have asked faculty to be prepared to move instruction online should this be necessary, and to provide remote learning opportunities to students who may be in isolation or in quarantine.

You will be joining the Notre Dame community in an unusual but I think exciting time. We will all need to make adjustments and be flexible because of the coronavirus crisis, and we will need your cooperation and help. Together we can join in the work of learning, inquiry and growth that is the life of the Notre Dame campus. Together, we can do this.

Know of my prayers for you and your loved ones. It is my sincere hope, and that of everyone here at Notre Dame, to be able to welcome you to campus in August.

Sincerely,

Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.
President