

Dear GCU students and families,

I want to welcome all of you to GCU for the fall semester. Whether you are a new or returning student, are taking classes fully online due to the COVID-19 pandemic or will be coming to our Phoenix campus, this will be an academic semester unlike any in the history of GCU.

While that certainly presents its share of challenges, it also presents opportunities for us to grow and thrive as a campus community. Our highest priorities continue to be to 1) ensure the health and safety of everyone in the GCU community, 2) enable all students to continue on their academic journey and move forward toward completing their degrees, and 3) provide an on-campus environment where the tremendous culture and community for which GCU is nationally known is able to thrive even in the realities of COVID-19. I am confident that we have the infrastructure and expertise in place to allow that to happen, regardless of which learning modality you are choosing.

As you know from the messages you have received over the past six months, we have been extremely busy making preparations on both our ground and online campuses to make your experience the best that we can in these unique circumstances. We appreciate the patience, determination and grace that students and parents have demonstrated in assisting in that process.

We have invested heavily in a number of policies including face mask requirements, physically distant classrooms, voluntary COVID-19 testing for as many as 10,000 individuals per month, contact tracing, blended learning opportunities, increased sanitization protocols, plexiglass barriers, increased outdoor activities, additional outdoor seating and shade structures for our 32 on-campus restaurants, stringent visitor guidelines and event accommodations to provide physical distancing. These policies adhere to CDC and local health guidelines and ensure that the campus community will be as safe as possible.

We are constantly monitoring other organizations – whether they are universities, professional sports leagues or even entire countries -- to see how they are handling COVID-19 and the impact it is having on their constituents. I am sure you have seen news reports about spikes in positive cases occurring at universities across the country, in large part due to off-campus gatherings in which COVID-19 precautions are not being observed. Some of those universities have already had to reverse course and move classes to an online environment.

We don't anticipate that GCU will have zero positive cases on campus this fall. That's not realistic. But we have several built-in advantages to help prevent a spike from occurring:

- 1) We are a private enclosed campus. It is not an open environment where students mix with members of the public like you find on many public campuses.
- 2) We don't have the unsupervised off-campus fraternities and sororities that are involved in COVID-19 outbreaks at many institutions.
- 3) We are a caring Christian community in which people have an unwavering concern for one another.

The latter point is the most important differentiator. And it doesn't come from a top-down mentality that only emanates from the administration. People like Pastor Tim Griffin and his staff certainly do a fantastic job fostering that environment, but it really originates from you, our students, and your families. I am constantly impressed by the character and integrity of our students and the concern they show for one another. And I'm convinced it derives from our faith.

That faith, and our faith in one another, is what gives me confidence that we can have a safe and successful fall semester amidst this pandemic. But it will take all of us -- faculty, staff and students -- working together and strictly abiding by the requirements and behaviors we have agreed upon. We can't behave as if these are normal times, because they are not. That means wearing face coverings when not in our offices or residences, practicing physical distancing, washing and sanitizing your hands often, participating in testing and tracing as necessary, performing daily self-administered wellness checks and staying home if you feel ill.

I know you want to be on campus the entire semester; that is what we want too. It will take each of us acting responsibly and being a leader so that others will follow.

The social experience of college, in addition to the academic aspects, is important to students. And it should be. You will be making connections and meeting people who will be friends for the rest of your life. The vibrant community atmosphere on campus is why many students choose GCU and I want you to experience that, but to do so in controlled environments on campus that are safer for everyone. Our team has worked hard to create a variety of different activities. Some of those will be in smaller group settings. Some will be larger groups that are in a physically distant setting. Some will be virtual activities or grab-and-go events. Many will occur outdoors. We will also livestream many events so that students who are not able to be on campus can experience them as well.

Another important aspect of this academic year will be the activities and conversations we have surrounding inequality and social injustice that exists in America. We have expanded our Multicultural Office and [promoted Donald Glenn to a key unifying role](#) as director of that important department. I encourage students to visit Donald and his staff in the Student Life Building and to also participate in an Awareness Walk on Sept. 27. We'll share more information on that event and many other activities related to diversity when students return to campus.

As we work together in an environment that is caring, respectful, flexible and supportive of one another, the GCU Christian community is uniquely equipped to handle the "new normal" that is the COVID-19 pandemic. I can't wait to see everyone on campus again and I am proud that you are part of the GCU Family!

God bless,

Brian Mueller

President, Grand Canyon University