

As we continue to prepare for the Fall semester at Grand Canyon University and gather input from students, families and our Parent Council, one sentiment keeps resonating: Members of the GCU community overwhelmingly want to return to campus in August in an environment that is as close to the full GCU experience as possible.

We feel both blessed and humbled by that sentiment, as it is a reflection of the culture and welcoming atmosphere that our Christian community is known for. We're also challenged by that sentiment, as we take very seriously the importance of keeping our students, faculty, staff and campus visitors as safe as possible during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Fall planning

To that end, we want you to know that GCU is working diligently toward those efforts. The University has 11 committees that meet almost daily to address the concerns of COVID-19 and provide recommendations to GCU's Emergency Preparedness Task Force. Those committees are addressing everything from classrooms and laboratories, restaurant accommodations, residence halls, performing arts, athletics, student recreation and fitness opportunities, remote working options for full-time faculty/staff and student workers, Health and Wellness Clinic protocols, physical distancing parameters, sanitization procedures, coronavirus testing and tracing, and more.

It's still premature to know what accommodations will be necessary in August but we are making preparations for all contingencies. While we cannot eliminate all risks, we intend to mitigate those threats to the extent that Arizona health guidelines at the time require while at the same time provide students with a social experience as those health guidelines allow. Universities will learn much about COVID-19 in the coming weeks as states, including Arizona, begin reopening businesses and relaxing stay-at-home guidelines.

Our intent is to be completely transparent with our decisions regarding Fall 2020 preparations and will communicate those as we move forward.

Student choice

As a reminder, GCU is committed to giving students and families an opportunity to choose which learning modality best suits them. If there are students who have underlying health conditions, have family members who are high-risk COVID-19 candidates or simply feel uncomfortable living and studying in a dense campus population, we will support students by providing options to allow them to continue their coursework online in most academic programs for the first semester or even the entire 2020-21 academic year. For students who choose an online modality in the Fall, it is highly likely we will still be able to provide housing for them in the Spring.

For those who are comfortable being back on campus in the Fall, we look forward to welcoming you to the campus community and will have appropriate protocols in place based on the health conditions at that time.

COVID-19 response

We have been fortunate that only two GCU resident students have become ill. We were able to immediately test these two students, who had been in contact with each other, isolate and care for them, conduct contact tracing and sanitize the areas they visited. Both students have recovered and are doing well.

If COVID-19 has not lessened by the Fall, those challenges of course will be magnified with 24,000 students on campus, including 14,000 living in our residence halls, and 5,000 full-time faculty and staff. We are confident our students, faculty and staff will continue to demonstrate the grace and compassion for one another to meet these challenges and allow the campus community to thrive.