

As the entire nation continues to see an increase in coronavirus cases, we'd like to provide information related to the Thanksgiving break, look ahead to spring break 2021 and provide another update on COVID cases on campus.

Thanksgiving break

We are highly encouraging students to remain on campus during the four-day Thanksgiving break. While airline travel has been deemed safer than at first feared, there is still the possibility that students could A) unknowingly take the coronavirus home to their parents or grandparents if they have been exposed but are still asymptomatic, or B) bring it back to campus if they are exposed while at home, especially those travelling to the Midwest or other COVID hot spots.

We encourage students to do voluntary COVID testing, but even an initial negative test result can create a false sense of security, as it can take several days after an exposure to test positive due to the virus' incubation period.

We know many of you have already foregone trips home during long weekends during the semester in order to avoid such risks and keep everyone safe during this unprecedented time. For the greater good of everyone, we are urging students to make this sacrifice and stay on campus with their "second family" of friends during the break. A take-out "Friendsgiving" meal is being planned at Harvest Kitchen in the Student Union on Thursday, Nov. 26 and will include traditional holiday favorites such as turkey/pot roast/tofurky, mashed potatoes and gravy, candied yams, stuffing, green bean casserole, Waldorf salad, harvest salad, and pumpkin and pecan pie.

Other activities are also in the works. The four-day break kicks off the preceding evening with the first men's basketball game of the season on Nov. 25 at GCU Arena vs. Grambling State. Even amidst COVID-19, the Havocs will ensure that GCU Arena remains "the biggest party in college basketball" as attendance will be for students only in a reduced-capacity, physically-distant configuration with masks required. Viewing will also be available at other campus locations tbd.

Plans are also being finalized for a "Thanksgiving Day Parade" that will include costumes/balloons/etc. and will traverse the hallways for students who have been placed in quarantine or isolation.

If you do travel during the break, we advise you to:

- Reduce potential exposures between now and your departure date;
- Minimize the number of stops during the trip;
- Once you are at home, avoid activities beyond immediate family members;
- Be outdoors when possible;
- Continue to follow COVID protocols such as mask-wearing, physical distancing and frequent hand-washing;
- Take a COVID test at the GCU Health and Wellness Clinic.

Spring break 2021

To avoid a potential coronavirus outbreak, some universities have announced plans to cancel spring break in 2021 and instead provide days off at other times before, during or after the semester.

GCU is currently gathering input from students but does not expect to make any announcements regarding its spring break (scheduled for March 15-21) until mid-January. This gives us a chance to evaluate the COVID-19

impact of students returning home from Christmas break, gather more information on the timing of a potential vaccine, and continue to analyze COVID data from both local and national health authorities.

As such, the spring semester is still scheduled to begin Jan. 4, with the first week of classes for most programs occurring in an online format to provide more flexibility to students traveling back to campus during the holidays. Exceptions are students in the nursing and athletic training programs who have gone through the secondary acceptance process and are in the clinical rotations of their programs. Instruction in those programs will remain face-to-face during the first week.

Students can move back to campus beginning the weekend of Jan. 2-3 or anytime the rest of that week. Move-In for students with a Spring Only contract will take place Jan. 2-9 by appointment.

If a decision is made in January to cancel spring break, GCU would end the semester a week early, with the term ending April 18 instead of April 25.

COVID update

The number of positive COVID cases on campus has decreased in the last few days, which is a good sign we may be past the uptick in cases that came after Halloween weekend. This doesn't lessen the severity of the virus but it's a strong indication that people are being more careful. We want to thank everyone for their diligence in that regard.

There are still currently 177 active cases of COVID-19 on campus – about 1% of the campus population – which is about the same number that was reported last week. The lower totals from the past few days will impact that in a positive way moving forward.

If everyone continues to be careful moving forward and follows COVID safety protocols (mask wearing, physical distancing, frequent hand washing, etc.) we look forward to a successful completion of the semester after classes resume following the Thanksgiving break.