
From: Dean of Students <deanofstudent@uwlax.edu>

Sent: Tuesday, September 22, 2020 4:41 PM

Subject: A message from the Dean of Students

Dear Students-

The City of La Crosse has experienced some extraordinary COVID-related impacts over the last couple of weeks. Quite frankly, things are not going well. What we know to be true today is that COVID-19 positivity rates in La Crosse County are increasing sharply and at an alarming rate. Between September 7th and September 13th, more than 400 positive cases were reported in La Crosse County. As of September 18, 2020, the New York Times identified La Crosse, WI as “the metro area [in the United States] where new cases are rising the fastest, on a population-adjusted basis.” This is not good.

Recently, UW-La Crosse, Viterbo University, Western Technical College, UWL Police Department, La Crosse Police Department, the La Crosse County Health Department, and area real estate rental partners, 360 Real Estate and Benson Realty, have begun to collaborate with some hope there is still opportunity to sway students toward better decisions. Universities are doing their best to coordinate strong testing programs and to provide important quarantine and isolation space for those who are infected or who have come into contact with those who are positive. While isolation and quarantine is a drag, we need students to understand how vital this is to keep others safe.

I am deeply concerned that many students do not seem to be doing what is needed to slow the spread of COVID-19. Over the previous weeks, I’ve read numerous reports of college-aged students hosting large gatherings, particularly at off-campus locations. I’ve seen photographs of students gathering at downtown establishments. In all instances, there are few indications people are wearing face coverings or distancing themselves from others. Sadly, I’m seeing evidence too that some quarantined and isolated students are just not staying put, instead choosing to leave their space and/or gather with others.

Now more than ever, I call upon all students to help stop the current spread of the virus by doing these things:

- Stop gathering. Whether indoors or outdoors, this is simply not the time. The data are telling us this. Crowded and loud venues lend themselves to close proximity and contact with unmasked students. This is a perfect recipe for contracting and spreading the virus further. When you gather, you put yourself at risk and you put others at risk, as well.
- If you are positive for COVID-19, stay isolated. If you were in contact with a COVID-positive person, stay quarantined. Follow the expectations that have been communicated to you in those spaces. If the virus has nowhere to go, we can beat it!
- Practice good hygiene. We’ve all heard it a million times now: Wash your hands.
- Report your symptoms or positive test to the university immediately. Answer your phone and talk with the contact investigators from UWL or from the county health department. It is vital they communicate with your contacts so they can also stay away from others.
- Did I mention to stop gathering?

This is not the semester we want but it is the semester we have. And it stinks. I understand students want to gather and be with one another. But, I also recognize that if students want some manner of continued engagement and for our campus to remain open, they must do better. If there was ever a time for students to bring their best selves forward, this is it. We’ll continue to educate students and hold them accountable to the degree we can, but ultimately each student has to take personal responsibility for themselves and each other. So, let’s get after it!

Yours, in community,

Greg Phlegar, Dean of Students