Subject: Update to COVID-19 Off Campus Gatherings Email

Dear Students,

Welcome back to the Bluff! I hope that you are excited to return and that your first day of classes went well! I am writing to you at this time as a follow-up to the email that you received on Thursday, August 20, 2020 regarding “COVID-19 Off Campus Gatherings and Consequences.” Since sending out the email, we have received a number of emails requesting clarification on several items. We appreciate your willingness to reply with your questions. Thank you!

As you know, our goal is always to keep our Duquesne community as safe as possible and we realize that this may require having extraordinary expectations. I am confident you understand the need for these efforts. That said, the following is a compilation of the questions received, grouped into general themes, followed by a University response. These should help clarify the questions that you presented in the emails.

**Can you please define “social gatherings?”** For instance, can I visit family, go home to visit, shop, grocery shopping, study with friends, attend family weddings and other related family events, work out at gyms, go to dinner, participate in community service, take a walk to gain a fresh perspective, playing golf with a friend, carpool to clinical, etc.?

The intent here is to prevent the sorts of gatherings, particularly parties, that tend to involve large groups of people, without masks, whose behaviors may be less cautious and involve people with whom you do not typically associate and particularly who are outside of your R-PODs. Common sense is most important. Students visiting family, conducting community service or working at a job, as a few examples, with safety measures in place (including masking, social distancing, and proper hygiene), should be fine. Completing the Daily Health Screen Questions and ensuring continuous proper observance of proper safety measures is key and necessary as part of the new Student Code of Conduct measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

**If these guidelines or the message cause extra stress or aggravate existing mental health challenges, what resources are available to help with feelings of isolation and anxiety?**

Duquesne’s Center for Student Wellbeing has enhanced its offerings due to the conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. More information is available at the Counseling Services website, especially instructions for telehealth access to counseling. We regret that the message caused duress for some individuals, particularly because so many are indeed working hard to do their part for a collective good. At the same time, we know from what is happening nationally that messages regarding behaviors have to be strong or they simply are not noticed. Since what we do now collectively has such enormous stakes for all students and our region, the University opted for a stronger tone than it might otherwise use. We will bear in mind the effects of this statement as we consider future statements.

**Are faculty and staff being held to the same standards?**

Faculty and staff take the same Protect Duquesne Pledge, answer the same Daily Health Screen Questions, and are expected to follow the same safety and hygiene protocols, and unit supervisors know to enforce those expectations.
Does the ban on social events apply to student attending classes remotely?

While all enrolled students are subject to the Student Code of Conduct, regardless of their place of residence, students who attend classes remotely and will not return to campus at any point this semester are not held to the same expectation. As a matter of safety, they should still follow safety protocols as a good preventive practice. If a student intends to visit campus, it is still a requirement to quarantine for 14 days and then to restrict any interactions to a small group of people.

What facts and figures support your policies?

Duquesne University is a private institution of higher education that can and does set the terms under which people can study or participate in activities on its campus, live in its residences, or be employed. Its policies are informed by recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Allegheny County Health Department, and close professional monitoring of conditions in our region.

What gives Duquesne the ability to dictate policy in private residences?

Duquesne cannot dictate policy in private residences. However, we are in a health crisis, and the University, as a private institution of higher education, can and does set the terms under which people can study or participate in activities on its campus, live in its residences, or be employed. Furthermore, all enrolled students are subject to the Student Code of Conduct, regardless of their place of residence. Current policies for mask-wearing, social distancing, hygiene, and the Protect Duquesne Pledge are part of the Student Conduct Policy and part of the expectations of students.

Again, thank you for your questions! Please bear in mind that our COVID-19 Planning and Information page on the University’s website also had a continuously updated set of FAQs to help you, if you need it.

I wish you the very best for a safe and successful semester.

Sincerely,

Dr. Frizzell

Douglas K. Frizzell, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President for Student Life

In Person and on Social Media!

Sent: Monday, August 24, 2020 6:30 PM