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Good morning and welcome to **Week 1** of Spring 2021! Here are this week's updates:

### **COVID-19 Vaccination Update**

Unfortunately, there is not much new to share. College personnel continue to work closely with the Springfield Greene-County Health Department and local hospitals to be ready as soon as we can get our hands on the vaccine. As I shared on the [OTC Faculty Facebook page](#) a few days ago, we were told last week that Higher Education is now considered to be in Phase 2, instead of Phase 1B. That was extremely frustrating. However, the good news is that once we get the vaccine, we are ready to move. Many, many, many thanks to all the wonderful nurses who work at OTC and our fantastic nursing students who will be helping put shots in arms. There are certainly heroes among us.

### **COVID-19 Testing**

OTC will continue to offer free, asymptomatic COVID testing Monday-Friday for the foreseeable future on the Springfield campus. The [hours are listed here](#). **Remember, this is for employees and students only!** Community testing events through the Missouri Department of Health and Human Services [will also continue around the state](#). And as always, if you have symptoms of COVID, you may use the [Cox Virtual Visit portal](#) with the code "OTC."

### **Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Visit**

This is the big show, folks. Every 10 years, we have the opportunity to demonstrate to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC, our accrediting organization) that we provide quality education, adequate student supports, and that we run our institution responsibly and with integrity. In essence, we get to show how we fulfill our mission. This year's visit is scheduled for March 29-30 and will be virtual, so we aren't yet sure what level of involvement our faculty will have – but you will definitely have a role. As plans are firmed up, we will pass those along.

The college will be sending all students a link to participate in HLC's student survey on Monday, January 25th. This is an important part of the visit, so **please help encourage students to complete the survey**.

### **Eagle Breakfast**

Starting today, any OTC student with a current ID number can receive a free breakfast, Monday-Friday 7:30-8:30 a.m. in Café 101 on the Springfield campus – no questions asked. Please help spread the word with your students. Many of our students struggle with food insecurity; this initiative aims to help address that. The [Eagle Breakfast FAQ page](#) has more information.

### **Final Thoughts**

As we begin this new semester with COVID still very much a threat, I think it's important to pause and consider the good:

- We are much smarter about this virus than we were just a few months ago.

We have been wise to let science guide our decision-making.

- We know that the mitigation measures of distance and masks do indeed work.
- We can report no confirmed instances of infection at any OTC location when these measures were in place.
- We know how to carry on the important business of the college in spite of the threat and continue to serve our students.
- We have a vaccine on the horizon.

We have a lot of reasons to be optimistic, but let's keep our guard up. Continue to follow the guidance of scientists and health experts: Wear your mask and limit close interactions with others – at work and at home.

As I begin this semester, I am also thankful that living through a pandemic has taught me flexibility and how to better cope with uncertainty. Throughout my life, nothing has given me more stress than being unable to predict with some reasonable level of certainty what is going to happen next. I'm a planner, but this last year has thrown that out the window. It has also reinforced to me the importance of not only teaching our students specific skills to make them employable, but also the importance of better equipping them to deal with the inevitable uncertainty of life. Many students come to us seeing a black and white world, when in reality, there's a whole lot of gray out there. I encourage us to put a focus on educating them to think critically, problem-solve, seek credible sources of information, and consider perspectives other than their own. This is the heart of education. These are the tools that will help them make their way through the muck of the gray.

Wishing you a fulfilling Spring semester. Please don't ever hesitate to reach out.

**Tracy M. McGrady, Ed.D.**

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