

July 08, 2021

Dear Students,

Today, I write to introduce myself and my colleagues in the Division of Student Affairs, and to provide you with details about our Welcome Week plans and the community you will soon join here on campus.

I serve as the University's Vice President for Student Affairs, and I am honored to lead a team of professionals who support your formation in our residential communities and a variety of departments dedicated to student life. My colleagues and I are committed to making Notre Dame a place where you can grow in mind and heart, deepen your faith, develop your character, and form lifelong friendships. All of this takes place in the context of our 32 residence halls, more than 500 student clubs and organizations that seek your involvement and leadership, retreats and faith formation opportunities offered through Campus Ministry, and the many services and programs dedicated to your vocational discernment and personal well-being. You can learn more about Student Affairs and our services here, and this video helps to illustrate how our work contributes to your student experience and lifelong formation.

You will soon learn that our students often introduce themselves with a "Notre Dame introduction" (where you live, your major, and where you are from). Here is mine: I grew up in Springfield, Pennsylvania, graduated from Notre Dame in 2001 with a degree in history and government, and lived in Morrissey Hall, where I served as a Resident Assistant and, later on, Assistant Rector. I went on to earn two post-graduate degrees from Notre Dame: a juris doctor in 2004 and a master of divinity in 2009. After law school I entered formation with the Congregation of Holy Cross and was ordained a Holy Cross priest in April 2010. I returned to Notre Dame in 2018, and have since lived in-residence in Alumni Hall. This is also my first year as Vice President for Student Affairs at Notre Dame, and I am thrilled to accompany you as you embark on your Notre Dame journey.

Your New Home

Here at Notre Dame, we believe in the formation of the mind and the heart, a formation that happens best within a community dedicated to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of each individual. Inspired and continuously animated by the University's Catholic and Holy Cross mission, we are committed to creating a community of hope where you can encounter God's love and in turn share that love with one another in order to be a force for good in the world.

For our first year students and others who will be living on campus, we hope you first experience this community in your residence hall, which in many cases will be the first place you visit when you arrive. As you may know by now, we intentionally organize our halls to bring people together from all backgrounds, areas of study, and class years, creating meaningful opportunities to learn from one another, celebrate our differences, and grow as active participants in Christian community.

Now that many of you have received your housing assignments, please reach out to say hello and simply ask to learn the story of your new roommate (or roommates). As you do so, please remain especially aware of the ways your new roommate(s) may differ from you. The community we are a part of is a vibrant and exciting one—our students come from a multitude of racial backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, religions, sexual orientations, immigration statuses, and political views. You are all immensely talented, created in the image and likeness of God, and treasured members of our community. Despite good intentions, our students have told us that roommate and residence hall introductions can sometimes create anxiety or plant doubt about a student's sense of belonging at Notre Dame. Resist the urge to make assumptions, especially based on identity, and be open to the possibility of learning something new. This relationship is an important one to you and to us, and I hope this initial introduction will set a foundation for a wonderful year together. May your hall become a true home, and know that your rector and hall staff are resources to help you navigate this new environment.

I also encourage those of you living on campus to spend as much time as possible immersing yourself fully in your new hall community—make time to get to know your rector and hall staff; invest in the relationships with your roommate(s), but also those members of your section, floor, and hall. Meet the priest (or priests)-in-residence who provide an additional layer of care and support for you. Some of you may even have faculty members living in your halls who are also available to accompany and mentor you. These relationships are invaluable as you navigate your time as a Notre Dame student.

Welcoming You

This year, we welcome you to campus with an awareness of the challenges you may have faced throughout the pandemic and an understanding of the concerns you may have about health and safety protocols and finding shared interests with others at Notre Dame.

Responding to these circumstances means we have updated many aspects of our Welcome Week program. However, our goal is unchanged: we want this to be a place where you feel you belong and can flourish.

Classes are scheduled to begin on Monday, Aug. 23, and Welcome Week will begin for all first year students on Friday, Aug. 20. Programming for parents and families will conclude on the evening of Saturday, Aug. 21, with additional student-only opportunities and events continuing on Sunday, Aug. 22 and throughout the first week of classes.

Throughout the weekend, our Welcome program will provide you with opportunities to meet academic leaders, introduce yourself to other students, learn more about University support services, and explore our beautiful campus. We are delighted to announce there is no longer a restriction on the number of guests you may invite to join you during Welcome Week. Watch for full details to be posted over the next few weeks as plans are subject to change based on our evolving understanding of COVID-19 and its impact.

Last month I announced that, because of our high rates of COVID-19 vaccination, low campus case rates, and St. Joseph County's improved case rates, those who are fully vaccinated for COVID-19 no longer need to wear masks on campus. With this in mind, we also understand there are different approaches to masking and a number of reasons why someone might continue to wear a mask. These include a need to protect an at-risk family member, personal peace of mind, working with people from outside the community, or being exempt from the vaccination requirement themselves. It is important that we continue to be welcoming and respectful of each others' decisions and personal circumstances, so please keep this in mind as you meet others throughout Welcome Week and the entire fall semester.

We are delighted that you chose to come to Notre Dame, and cannot wait to see how your presence impacts our campus. As you begin this year, please remember to be open, be patient, and have hope. Finding your way, making friends, and building community in a new place happens at a different pace for every student, and we are all here to help you with this transition.

In a few weeks, I will write again to introduce some important training modules that underscore the values we hold as a community. In the meantime, know of my best wishes and prayers as you prepare for Welcome Week and familiarize yourself with the Notre Dame community.

In Notre Dame,

Fr. Gerry Olinger, C.S.C.

Vice President for Student Affairs



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