

New year, new protocols

As COVID-19 continues to change, protocols change as well. Here is a guide to what's new and what's not with the pandemic.

By Soraya Keiser

Due to fewer COVID-19 guidelines, students are able to receive a more typical college experience than last year, when Bethel operated amid the throes of a pandemic. They can collaborate in person on projects, attend sporting events and take advantage of the make-your-own waffle station in the Monson Dining Center. Although many are overjoyed by this lack of restriction, some are still worried about the spread of the virus, especially with news of the Delta variant, a new strand of COVID-19 that is more infectious and dangerous than previous strands.

One group of people desiring more restrictions is Bethel's Faculty Senate. On Aug. 25, the Senate discussed COVID-19 mitigation on campus and wrote up a motion reading, "Faculty Senate moves to request that the administration follows CDC and MDH guidelines more directly, including clear messaging to students to mask at all times indoors and provide consistent testing for unvaccinated people."

75% of senators voted in favor of this motion.

Spiritual Formation

Chapel and Vespers continued last year in Benson Great Hall with social distancing and masking requirements. This year, social distancing is not required and masks are only recommended within Benson.

Another part of spiritual formation at Bethel is Shift, a discipleship experience for freshmen. Due to social distancing protocols last year, freshman floors met with their Shift leaders in classrooms instead of in dorms.

"Last year was really hard for Shift. It was almost completely derailed," Associate Dean of Discipleship Ministries Dale Durie said. "Maintaining momentum was really hard and ... that kind of [classroom] environment was very disruptive."

This year, the Shift team is hoping to return to what Shift looks like in a typical pandemic-free year. Meeting in dorm rooms. More events. Deeper connections on the floor.

"It's a gift that these upperclass students are volunteering to come and be present to students in their first year," Durie said. "That's a God thing."

On Aug. 29, Benson was packed with students attending Koinonia, the kick-off event for spiritual formation this year. Many Shift leaders and their floors attended.

"We were actually able to fellowship together in a way that was close physically but also relationally," Shift Leader RyleeAnn Andre said. "I think having that shared experience will allow us to make deeper and greater connections."



Nathan Hoff, Jordan Mugglin and Kayla Brunner studying in the Grill booths. | Photo by Andrew Wittenburg

Athletics

The MIAC has agreed to follow all NCAA guidelines regarding COVID-19 for the 2021-22 academic year.

All sports within the MIAC are planning on having conventional competition, but unvaccinated students must routinely get tested for COVID-19 before competitions and travel. Masks are also still required during indoor events such as team meetings and film practices, but they are not required during training or competition.

“It can be a little inconvenient,” Director of Athletics Greg Peterson said, “but it is much better than the alternative of not playing.”

Fans are once again allowed to attend sporting events after a year of quiet gyms and livestreamed games. Fan guidelines are determined by the host school of each competition, and Bethel is welcoming spectators to all sporting events.

“We have to be intentional about how we re-engage the community,” Peterson said.

After a hiatus from sporting events for the past 18 months, the athletic department hopes students are excited to cheer on their classmates from the sidelines.

Dining Center

Although masks are not required in all parts of campus, Sodexo and student workers in the Dining Center, 3900 Grill and Royal Grounds will continue to follow protocols established last year regarding masks, hand washing and sanitizing high-touch surfaces.

“The health and safety of our employees and customers is a core value and our highest priority,” Sodexo General Manager Michele Hamersma said.

While these employee protocols remain, students have access to self-serve and made-to-order options, as well as non-socially distanced seating.

“Protocols have changed throughout the past 18 months and will continue to change in response to new developments,” Hamersma said. “The Delta variant has driven the recent changes in CDC recommendations and policies of many businesses and schools.”



DC returns to self serve salad bar. | Photo by Andrew Wittenburg



Vaccination requirements within MIAC

MIAC schools requiring vaccine:

Augsburg University
Carleton College
Gustavus Adolphus College
Hamline University
Macalester College
College of Saint Benedict
St. Catherine University
Saint John's University
Saint Mary's University
St. Olaf College

MIAC schools not requiring vaccine:

Bethel University
The College of St. Scholastica
Concordia University St. Paul

Academics

Masks are required in classroom settings where six feet of distance cannot be maintained.

“All of the decisions we’ve made related to COVID-19 are intended to balance the student experience with reasonable safety precautions,” Director of COVID-19 Operations Kristi Moline said. “We are prioritizing in-person learning and will make adjustments to our mitigation strategies in order to remain face-to-face.”

One way that Bethel is less cautious than other colleges in response to COVID-19 is regarding vaccinations. Only three schools out of the 13 that make up the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference are not requiring students to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. Bethel is one of them. This decision is not contingent upon FDA approval of any of the vaccines.

“Bethel is a place that recognizes that we have each been created with a unique perspective and experience,” Kristi Moline said. “In that light, we want to honor individual and family perspectives regarding COVID-19 vaccination.”