

Greenville University Reports Strong Start To Rigorous Testing Procedures

September 21 2020 5:06 PM



GREENVILLE - Greenville University reports a strong start to its rigorous testing procedures that screen students and staff frequently for COVID-19. University administrators hope campus-wide compliance will preserve face-to-face learning through the fall semester.

In the early weeks of the school year, testing led to the rapid isolation of infected individuals and mitigated the spread of the virus. Developed in partnership with the University of Illinois Systems SHIELD program, GU's testing protocol averaged 1,600 tests per week (8/14 to 9/11). The tests require all faculty, students, and staff to provide saliva samples two times a week. Daily communication between the U of I System, the Bond County Health Department, and the Illinois Department of Public Health contributed to the smooth testing operation.

In the first two weeks, .29% of 3,147 saliva samples collected at GU tested positive for COVID-19 (this is what is known as the "positivity rate," a key indicator of infectiousness). Nine infected persons entered isolation and 55 potentially infected persons (identified by contact tracing) entered quarantine. New cases on campus soon declined to zero and the few positives in the past two weeks were from outside of campus. GU's President Suzanne Davis comments, "I am so thankful for the

opportunity to collaborate with the University of Illinois. We've been successful in containing the spread of the virus to the extent that the few positives we've had in the past two weeks are from outside of campus. Alongside careful treatment of isolation and quarantine cases during the first few weeks of testing, the SHIELD program has allowed us to reopen our campus responsibly in the Greenville community." Over the past four weeks (8/14-9/11), testing cooperation among GU's 700 students was at a compliance rate of 80% and its 180 employees were at a rate of 97% for following the twice-per-week SHIELD test protocols. Terrell Carter, Chief Diversity Officer and Special Advisor to the President reached out to any non-compliant student personally to remediate those testing only once per week.

According to Dr. Carter, "students received clear communication as to GU's standards and the consequences of not following the protocol before they arrived on campus. Compliance is monitored weekly and dealt with situationally." Health Department, coupled with quarantine responsiveness by GU, has effectively reduced COVID-19 spread. Week three had 4 consecutive days with zero positive tests. Cumulative tests reached over 6,000 in week four.

Strong Start in First Month of COVID-19 SHIELD Testing at Greenville University
Contact: Terri Sunderland 618.664.7031 terri.sunderland@greenville.edu
Contact tracing by the Bond County Health Department, coupled with quarantine responsiveness by GU, has effectively reduced COVID-19 spread. Week three had 4 consecutive days with zero positive tests. Cumulative tests reached over 6,000 in week four.

The majority of those who tested positive for COVID-19 evidenced no symptoms. This leads GU administrators to believe that without the testing system, COVID-19 could have spread quickly and silently across campus and into the larger Greenville community.

Jay Walsh, vice president of Economic Development and Innovation at the U of I System, said he is pleased that the promising start of the SHIELD testing program at GU has thus far allowed the school to conduct as much in-person education as possible this fall. "Greenville University was not coming to us because they just wanted a test. Their goal is the safety of their students, their faculty, and their staff to do what they do as a higher education institution, to have effective face-to-face interactions which make a huge difference for their students," Walsh said. "Adopting all of the components of the SHIELD program has made the difference. When this is done well, it works. Congratulations to Greenville University for doing it well." University administrators say GU will continue its comprehensive COVID-19 mitigation strategy, including the use of masks, frequent handwashing, 6-foot social distancing, and rigorous contact tracing.

Geet Vanaik, Dean of Academic, International and Student Services shared, “It is a historic time to be on campus with regular COVID-19 saliva testing and to witness how faculty and staff are leaning into GU’s mission of character and service to provide an impactful face-to-face educational experience for students in this challenging environment.”