



# Knowledge Is Power: Why Greenville University Returned Students To Campus After Thanksgiving

December 9 2020 10:48 AM



**GREENVILLE**  
**UNIVERSITY**

**GREENVILLE, IL.** - How could a university risk such a radical, bold move as to return students to campus after Thanksgiving break? Knowledge. That's how.

“Knowledge is power,” the saying goes. This fall, knowledge powered safe face-to-face learning in Greenville University’s classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic and freed students to enjoy an on-campus experience.

Thanks to a partnership with the University of Illinois Systems SHIELD program, data gained from more than 20,000 saliva tests conducted on GU’s campus informed administrators’ decisions. The testing protocol has required all faculty, students and staff to provide weekly and sometimes twice-weekly saliva samples all semester, something very few other institutions are doing. Some schools test roughly 10 percent of their population, mainly athletes.

“Testing prepares students to seek treatment, isolate quickly, and reduce spread,” says Suzanne Davis, Greenville University president. “The college population is rarely symptomatic. We test consistently to reduce spread to vulnerable populations. Most institutions are only testing students who exhibit symptoms. We see all of the iceberg rather than the tip.”

According to the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCCU), Inside Higher Ed, and The College Crisis Initiative (C2i) at Davidson College, Greenville University is one of very few institutions in the country that gave students the option to return to campus for classes after Thanksgiving break. Two-thirds of GU students expressed the desire to finish the semester via in-person classes.

[The College Crisis Initiative \(C2i\)](#) at Davidson College formed a research team that examined the fall 2020 reopening plans for universities nationwide. According to their data, out of 1,442 four-year schools, 443 opened for primarily in-person classes for the fall. According to C2i, just 77 universities facilitating in-person or a combination of online and in-person classes test weekly or twice-weekly for COVID. When asked about universities’ plans for post-Thanksgiving this semester, C2i Co-Director of Operations Samuel Owusu says GU defied the odds, noting that when other universities said they couldn’t reopen for in-person learning after Thanksgiving, Greenville University made it happen.

“It’s really interesting to see that innovation from the U of I SHIELD program being implemented at other colleges and universities,” Owusu says. “I would anticipate that Greenville’s a little bit of a success story that you all were able to defy those odds and

bring those students back who wanted to come back on campus, because not a lot of colleges did.”

Owusu says the team’s research showed that smaller colleges, particularly small liberal arts colleges, have been more effective than larger schools in testing for COVID-19, quarantining those who test positive, and keeping students safe.

“A big driver in colleges universities being able to on campus is socializing their students to buy into the testing culture, buy into social distancing,” Owusu says. He adds that getting 900 students to test twice a week as GU does “is no easy feat.”

Students at GU have bought into the culture and shown that they are willing to contribute to safety. Testing, social distancing, mask wearing and bracelet wearing are all part of daily life on campus. Students, staff, and faculty have the option to wear red, yellow, or green wristbands to designate their distancing comfort level. Red indicates a person is not comfortable with groups and prefers to keep distances of more than six feet and always use face masks. A green band designates no vulnerability or health concerns and a preference for using masks only if social distancing is not possible.

"Being able to return to in-person classes after Thanksgiving break is something our entire student body is grateful for," says Jaime Quesada, vice president of GU’s student body. “Thanks in large part to President Davis and her team's leadership, we as students here at GU appreciate and value the hard work that our administration has done to make this a possibility and give us the chance to have a unique college experience during times like these."

Out of approximately 20,000 tests to date, the University has realized 94 total unique positive cases. The total reflects staff, faculty, students, and contract employees on campus. Thirty-six of those were asymptomatic. Forty-three were only mildly symptomatic, and only one had severe symptoms.

Testing everyone on campus enables GU to contact trace early, quarantine early, and test those in quarantine. Greenville University will continue testing through the remainder of the school year to ensure the safety of its students, staff, and faculty.

For more information about Greenville University’s COVID-19 response and updated testing results, [click here](#).