

SIUE Reverses Course, Returns To In-Person Learning

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - SIUE's recently-announced return to in-person learning comes after an email from last week that announced courses would shift remotely, and as ongoing waves of COVID-19 variants [sweep through local counties.](#)

On January 6, 2022, SIUE sent a mass email to all students announcing they would be taking their on-ground Spring 2022 courses to a remote format amidst surging waves of COVID-19.

“Like so many of you, we are excited about the beginning of a new semester; however, we are also dedicated to ensuring that our plans reflect our commitment to the health and safety of our campus community,” the university stated in the email. “As you know, the latest variant, Omicron, is resulting in rapid transmission. Beginning Jan. 10 and through Jan. 17, we will shift courses online, to the extent possible.”

On January 12, the university reversed course in another email to students stating they were returning to in-person learning.

“Beginning Tuesday, Jan. 18, on-ground classes at the SIU System campuses in Edwardsville and Carbondale will resume as originally scheduled for spring 2022,” the university stated in the email.

Hannah Wittman, a senior at SIUE studying Speech-Language Pathology, expressed her opinion over the decision via Facebook on Wednesday.

“The positive cases just keep going up and now they want to send us back to campus Tuesday,” Wittman said.

Wittman also expressed her frustration over the university’s latest testing policy, which requires all students, faculty, and staff to test for COVID-19 on a weekly basis regardless of their vaccination status, “if they will be living, working, studying or engaging with the campus during that week.”

“I’m honestly so tired of this I would rather stay remote than deal with this garbage,” Wittman said in the post. “Anything to take up more of everyone’s time and not to mention the amount of time it takes to get through the testing lines.”

In the initial email announcing in-person courses were going remote, the university stated it made the decision “after careful consideration of initial re-entry testing results, self-disclosure reports, and area COVID trends, and in consultation with experts in the SIU School of Medicine.”

The email announcing the return to in-person, however, did not include that statement.

SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke said the school has still been in regular consultation with the School of Medicine and that their latest data indicates positive tests are going down.

“The decision announced this week was a decision of the SIU System, and so the campuses in Springfield, Carbondale, and Edwardsville moving to on-ground was an important part of that conversation in terms of coordinating a unified, uniform approach,” Pembroke said. “Our data have moved a little bit. We had some subgroups that were testing at 15-20%, our most recent data is between 13-14%.”

The latest email to students mirrored this sentiment, stating, “While certain data points are currently high, our indicators show the data will flatten compared to Week 1.”

Pembroke said he understands the concerns of students and parents and that the university has prepared accommodations.

“I understand this is a very difficult thing,” Pembroke said. “The whole country is working through the concept of, ‘What can we do,’ ‘What can we do safely?’ I would underscore that if people have concerns, if they have an immunocompromised system, if they have someone in their family that is in that situation if they have religious concerns, we have obviously built that into our model, and people can communicate with us about that for special accommodations - and I would encourage people to do that if they’re in those situations.”

Pembroke said students should reach out to Student Affairs or the university’s ACCESS office for special accommodations, and that faculty and staff can reach out to Human Resources.

SIUE will resume in-person courses for Spring 2022 on January 18. In addition to expanding their testing protocol, Pembroke also stated the university is looking into ordering Level 3 and KN95 masks to distribute to on-campus community members.