



BENNETT COLLEGE

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

900 EAST WASHINGTON STREET
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA 27401

OFFICE: (336) 517-2225
FAX: (336) 370-8688

Statement on Spring Semester 2021

Dearest Bennett College Family,

As you all know, on November 21, 2020, the Board of Trustees of Bennett College held a special Board meeting to make a decision regarding the Spring 2021 semester and voted for Bennett College to remain virtual next semester based on the latest public health data. This letter is a summary of the various Zoom meetings where we shared this news before Thanksgiving with students, families, faculty, staff and alumnae. A reminder: for students who have special circumstances please be in contact with Dean Kimberley Drye-Dancy.

As President, I am not only responsible for supporting the education, training, and leadership skills of women attending Bennett but also ensuring the health and safety of all students, faculty, and staff. The COVID pandemic poses one of the most significant threats to us at this time. I have consulted with National and Global Public Health experts, including those from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the NC Department of Health and Humans Services, the Guilford County Health Department, and our own alumna and Social Epidemiologist Dr Sharelle Barber to understand the best medical information on the coronavirus, the public health implications of COVID, and what we know about prevention, treatment, and care. In addition to those consultations, VP Hurd and I meet weekly with other Guilford higher education institutions and the county health department and Ms Francois and I meet one-on-one weekly with the lead doctor and nurse from the county health department. We take the public health considerations seriously.

The public health considerations for us include instituting measures to prevent infection, limiting transmission from infected persons to others, isolating persons who are infected, caring for those who are ill; contact tracing those who are personal contacts of infected persons and providing the appropriate protection, education, and services to everyone. We do not have all of those pieces in place yet. We are aiming for Fall 2021 to be prepared for students, faculty, and staff to be back on campus.



During the past two weeks we have learned both very good and very bad news regarding COVID. As of today, there are three vaccine candidates with proven efficacy that will prevent severe COVID infections. This is an important accomplishment and advance in our efforts to address this disease. Unfortunately, the bad news is that it will take months for these vaccines to be produced and administered to all Americans who need it, especially those in communities of color.

In the meantime, the virus is spreading quickly and everywhere. Last week we had the highest number of new cases in our country, state, and county and we have the highest hospitalization rates we have seen since the start of this pandemic. I am saddened by this including the death of a dear colleague, [President McPhail of St Augustine's University](#), and the recent death of [Livingstone College Senior, Jamesha Waddell](#). We have also had four essential staff members of the Bennett College Family test positive resulting in the Health Department requiring that we close a building. So while our smallness is our strength, it does not make us immune.

With that in mind, out of an abundance of caution, and because the public health models are not showing enough improvement to gather in large groups by May, Commencement will be virtual. Senior Class President, Taylor Adkins, will be reaching to Seniors for ideas about what would make for a meaningful virtual experience. [Here is last year's virtual ceremony](#) to get you started in your thinking. Our work starts early in January for planning; so do some thinking over the break and bring your best ideas to the planning discussions.

The Board, Senior Leadership Team, and I do not take these decisions lightly. We continue to put health and wellbeing of our students and employees at the center of our decision making and cannot in good conscious bring back students, faculty and staff in-person at this time. We will miss all of you but it is imperative that we each continue to take this virus seriously to help get the community spread under control.

Please continue to stay safe. Wear a mask. Socially distance. Saves lives.

Suzanne Elise Walsh, JD
President
Bennett College
@BennettPres_SEW

