
PRINCIPIA COLLEGE

Dear Parents and Families,

Principia College is entering the fifth week of fall semester with much to be grateful for.

I recognize this will be a long message—I want to summarize the good that is occurring at the College and bring you up to date on our implementation of Illinois' legal requirements for higher education regarding COVID-19.

Gratitude for the Good

First, let me share the deep gratitude we have for the initial weeks of this semester:

- New student orientation, athletic camps, and settling into dormitories are behind us. The first hint of autumn touched Elsau last week, though summer temperatures are still lingering.
- *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked Principia College #59 of 222 nationally recognized liberal arts colleges and universities in its 2022 rankings. That's up from #93 the prior year.
- We are ranked sixth in the nation for best value—a combination of quality of instruction and access to financial aid for those in need—among liberal arts colleges. We are in the company of Williams, Swarthmore, Pomona, Wellesley, and Colby Colleges.
- We are also recognized as the top fifth college for percentage of international students, along with Mount Holyoke and Earlham Colleges.
- Enrollment for fall semester is ahead of target, in part due to a strong entering class of international students, including our first student from Paraguay!
- Our entering class is the largest in several years. One impact is our ability to field a full range of competitive intercollegiate teams. We have men's and women's soccer, women's volleyball, cross-country, and rugby, among others. We are back in full force with St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic

Conference (SLIAC). Several of our athletes have NCAA Division III potential.

- This week, our abroad to Ecuador will depart campus for the balance of the term. Among the destinations are the Amazon and the famed Galápagos Islands. Our sponsoring university is ranked number one in Ecuador.
- This coming weekend, our internationally competitive mediation team begins its fall competition with travel to Georgia.
- *The Pilot*, our student newspaper, issued its newly redesigned tabloid format with an ambitious biweekly publication schedule.
- Faculty and staff report that classes are going well (and they are excited about our entering class of first-year and transfer students). There have been a variety of supplemental activities, including a professional showing in our James K. Schmidt Art Gallery, and the first of our fall theatre productions are deep into rehearsal.
- Extracurricular activities (also called co-curricular activities) have been full—student clubs have been re-energized; weekends have been filled with social activities; we’ve had visiting speakers for campus and class talks; and students are taking full advantage of College facilities.
- The renovated School of Government is open, with new, high-tech classrooms, comfortable study spaces, and redesigned administrative and faculty offices; we are already using a spacious outdoor deck for gatherings, studying, and teaching.
- The practice of Christian Science has been active and obvious. Weekly CSO testimony meetings are packed with inspiring testimonies (the most recent was a gratitude session hosted by the women’s basketball team—their season doesn’t begin until December, and they’ve already bonded); the weekly “Faith in Action” series attracts different audiences with a variety of events; we just completed a focused week of Christian Science activities across the entire Principia family. The College (along with four local Christian Science churches) sponsored an online lecture (given four different times) with over 550 attendees across our worldwide family. (I think our champion for distance joined from New Zealand.)
- We have had no reported cases of COVID-19 on campus this fall with our “prayer and protocols” response. Months before the state of Illinois issued its requirement, the College instituted mandatory masking in indoor public spaces. As a result of our safe practices, we have been able to allow students “to drop the mask” within their own dormitories—their “families” away from home.

State Requirements Regarding COVID-19

Let me to bring you up to date on the College's response to the recent [Executive Order](#) by the governor of Illinois that imposes the requirement that all Illinois institutions of higher education require vaccinations or weekly testing protocols beginning September 19. The requirement covers all higher education, both public and private, from community and technical colleges through the major state universities.

The Executive Order has two elements that directly affect Principia College:

1. Mandatory use of masks in indoor public spaces. The Order provides for no religious or philosophical exemptions, although there is an exemption for those having a documented medical condition.
2. All higher-education personnel and students must either provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination OR submit weekly negative test results. The Order provides an exemption from mandatory vaccination for religious reasons. However, the alternative to the vaccination is mandatory weekly testing, from which the Order provides no exemptions.

The Executive Order requires that any student or employee who does not comply with vaccination or weekly testing not be allowed to remain on campus.

The Executive Order went into effect on Sunday, September 19. The College protocol is to have documentation of either vaccination or weekly test results filed through our secure Magnus health documentation system. This system is used by many institutions to track and keep student health information secure. Those submitting documentation of vaccination do so only once; those submitting test results must do so once every seven-day period—Sunday through Saturday midnight.

I am pleased to report that all students (and faculty members) have submitted their preferred documentation. It took extra effort by resident counselors to remind students to upload their documentation. Some students also filed letters of protest or disagreement with the Executive Order. We hope students, parents, and families can appreciate the difficult position in which the Order has placed the College—and that we are committed to protecting, within the law, our practice of Christian Science.

For more than 18 months, the College administration has been guided by two goals:

- Continue the quality undergraduate education for which Principia is noted; and
- Protect the health and safety of all members of our community—students, faculty, staff, and resident families.

Meeting these objectives requires the College community's compliance with state and federal requirements in addressing COVID-19.

As we planned for a full in-person program for fall semester, we considered and planned for several scenarios—from continued masking to a dramatic return to Illinois Phase 3, which would require a pivot to remote instruction. None of us was prepared for a mandate of vaccination-or-testing without full religious exemptions.

In response to the Executive Order, I consulted with Principia's general counsel, with my fellow presidents of the Associated Colleges of Illinois (27 independent colleges and universities, including faith-based institutions), and with the SLIAC presidents. It was the conclusion of these presidents and their general counsels that the governor of Illinois has the legal authority to issue such an order, that the order is legal, and that there is no exemption for the vaccination-or-weekly-testing requirement.

In order to accommodate the religious privilege to refuse the vaccination, we have attempted to make the alternative of testing as simple and convenient as possible. We have arranged for a testing site on campus, with all tests provided for free (with generous support from the Jersey County Public Health Department) three times per week (currently Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday) with trained testing personnel under our supervision. Test results take only 15 minutes, and students don't have to wait. A certificate of the results is emailed to them and easily uploaded to the Magnus system. Students also have the option of using off-campus testing, though the state does not accept self-testing results.

This process was not difficult to organize since our varsity athletes must either be vaccinated or test three times each week, per athletic conference regulations.

Let me reaffirm, with athletes testing three times a week since the beginning of the term and other students testing for at least a week, we have not had a positive test result.

Having updated you on the unexpected shift in our fall 2021 planning to comply with the governor's Executive Order, I want to seek your support.

If you have a student who is opting to test weekly, we need your support in reminding and encouraging them to upload their test results by Saturday at midnight each week. All students who have opted to test have received multiple reminders from the administration about the process, requirements, and support options, and they will receive reminders each Sunday, Thursday, and Saturday that testing is required and a reminder to test and upload their results.

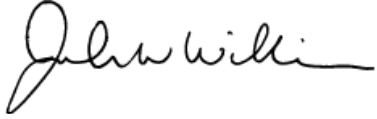
The Executive Order requires those who have not tested or reported their results to be removed from campus. Students have been told that if they fail to comply, they will have to leave campus for the remainder of the term. Each Sunday morning, any student who has not complied will get a notice that they must leave campus for the remainder of the term. On Monday, they will lose access to the buildings on campus.

This requirement may be the most challenging element of the Executive Order. My presidential colleagues are also struggling with this requirement, and each college has designed procedures for removing students. Our regional accrediting body, the Higher Learning Commission, expects all accredited institutions to follow all state and federal laws. Principia College fully intends to remain in compliance.

Your prayerful support of your student and our campus is vital. This year's Principia-wide metaphysical theme, "Grace to go forward, Wherever He guide Thee" (Hymn 278), has been our foundation as we navigate these unusual times. Please join with me in prayer for our College community and for the world.

Your student is a vital member of the Principia community. You can be proud of every student on this campus. Thank you for your ongoing support and for the many ways you nurture their college experience.

With gratitude and respect (and GRACE),

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John W. Williams, College President