

“This rise in cases in such a short period of time is nothing short of obscene”

The Bethlehem Gadfly coronavirus, Lehigh University February 17, 2021

 Latest in a series of posts on the coronavirus 

“Our inability to handle COVID-19 is not only an embarrassment, but serves as a serious hazard to students, professors and the entire Bethlehem community.”

Lehigh University Brown and White

The Mayor made no mention of this spike in his comments about the local virus happenings at City Council last night.

Sometimes it seems like Lehigh isn't located in Bethlehem.

Southsiders especially, be cautious!

selections from the Brown and White Editorial Board, “Too Little, Too Late.” February 14, 2021.

We are seeing, time and time again, Lehigh's administration deflect responsibility and refuse to take action until it's too late.

But now, it's causing concern for public safety.

According to the Lehigh COVID-19 dashboard, since Jan. 1 there have been a total of 430 positive cases of coronavirus among students living on and off campus. During the first week of classes, 104 students tested positive, and during the second week, 272 more students joined them.

This rise in cases in such a short period of time is nothing short of obscene.

It is evident that students have not been following Lehigh's social contract to social distance and limit social interactions to 10 people or less.

However, as much as it is the fault of students for being irresponsible, going to large unmasked gatherings, and spreading the virus, the responsibility also falls on the university to put tangible policy in place to penalize students for failure to adhere to rules and regulations.

This past semester started out by only testing students who chose the campus access option twice within the first two weeks of the semester. And for a while, there were no active cases of COVID-19 on or off campus, which the school made sure to boast about on its social media regularly. However, it is easy to have a low case count when there is little to no testing occurring.

And when the inevitable outbreak did occur, Lehigh closed its campus for two weeks, wasting the money of those who opted to pay for access to campus.

This semester students were required to show a negative test upon arrival, follow a moderated quarantine before classes began and partake in weekly testing for the first two weeks of the semester. After the initial two week testing period, 50 percent of students were planned to be tested each week.

This new method quickly proved ineffective. Within just two weeks, the case count more than tripled the 100 mark that shut down campus the semester prior.

The university administration knows that the majority of the infection occurs through off-campus social interactions, yet little is being done to inhibit students from attending such events.

There has been no protocol to check if students randomly selected for surveillance testing actually show up for their test, and there have been few reports of off-campus gatherings getting shut down by the police.

If students see no consequences for violating social contract, it can't be expected that they will alter their hazardous behavior.

Lehigh's suggestion? Anonymously report your friends.

While many students have turned to anonymous reporting, the method has proven ineffective as Lehigh sits with more active cases than universities with student bodies five times its size.

The egregious mishandling of COVID-19 is only amplified by the hypocrisy that exists within Lehigh's athletic department.

Throughout the various outbreaks that occurred last semester, athletics have continuously been paused and restarted, to only be paused again. When a player tests positive, they are put on a pause for a small, indefinite amount of time, unless it's a sport like basketball, where everybody is considered a close contact.

But on multiple occasions, athletics have been able to resume 24 hours after a reported outbreak, despite potential incubation time ranging from three to 14 days.

Whether it be stronger planning or fostering a student body who is more willing to adhere to rules and regulations, it is time Lehigh takes a page out of the planning books of its peers. Our inability to handle COVID-19 is not only an embarrassment, but serves as a serious hazard to students, professors and the entire Bethlehem community.

See also Andrew Scott, "Lehigh University urges double-masking, takes other precautions as coronavirus cases spike." Morning Call, February 12, 2021.