The Albion Pleiad

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COVID-19 Vaccine Rolls Out in Calhoun County

College Contemplates COVID-19 Regulations for Easter

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Opinion: April Vaccines Bring May Smoke Screens

Olivia Grantham
Staff Writer

Spring has sprung, but unlike last year, the ideology of COVID-19 disappearing with the warm weather is no longer present. Despite improved vaccination rollout, the pandemic is still very much alive, and in many parts of the country, cases are still rising.

On March 21, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced that all Michigan residents ages 16 and older will be eligible for the vaccine starting April 5. Citizens ages 16 to 49 with certain medical conditions or disabilities became eligible on Monday. Though it is a positive sign that vaccines are becoming more available, many see this as an opportunity to claim that the pandemic is nearing an end. We do not know this for certain.

Albion College's strict COVID-19 protocols have ensured that on-campus cases remain low, but the warm weather has prompted temptations to gather without masks. Especially given the success rates of the current vaccines, some people are beginning to see large gatherings as less of a threat.

The surge of tourists vacationing in Florida, as seen on social media, could be a contributing factor to the increased spread of COVID-19 in areas like Fort Myers and Miami. As students from around the country board airplanes and flock to southern states to take advantage of their bars and beaches during their respective spring breaks, they risk travelling with the virus. Even worse, it's possible that they bring it back to campus and spread it to their community.

According to the CDC, Florida reported more than two million active cases on Monday. Pictures and videos posted on social media depict tightly packed crowds, often containing hundreds of people, gathered in nightclubs, restaurants and town squares. This trend likely could continue through Easter and spring break season as people wish to gather with family and friends.

Although Albion College has chosen to bypass this year's spring break, it's unclear how strictly COVID-19 protocols will continue to be enforced. While masks and social distancing can be regulated in classroom and academic settings, other school-sanctioned events aren't following suit.

Just last weekend, multiple fraternities and sororities teamed up to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Large groups gathered outside the fraternities, passing frisbees and sharing sandbags in games of cornhole. During volleyball matches, new players constantly rotated in and out.

A group of students gather outside of the Sigma Chi fraternity house for St. Patrick's Day on March 17. While vaccine rollouts provide hope for an end to the pandemic, social gatherings still pose a threat (Photo by Sam Semerau).

While some were masked, others were not. Based on the amount of people present, it didn't seem that social distancing was much of an option.

At this point in the pandemic, some might think it unreasonable to put capacity limits on outdoor events and activities, but we should be safe rather than sorry. It is too soon to be undermining a virus that's infected over 70 million people worldwide, and taken the lives of more than two million.

We should continue to take the threat of COVID-19 seriously despite the promise of vaccines to come. Older populations have achieved immunity through vaccination, but this doesn't mean that younger people aren't still at risk. There's still time in the pandemic for things to get worse before they get better. If young people continue to defy reality, there's a chance that we could face more setbacks.

We must still be cautious of COVID-19. It won't vaporize with the warm weather, nor will it vanish once teenagers can be vaccinated. Patience and continued diligence will play huge roles in eradicating the virus. Until everyone has been vaccinated, we should continue to follow pandemic protocols.

All Adults Eligible for COVID-19 Vaccine Starting April 5

Taylor Dietz
News Editor

The COVID-19 vaccination eligibility will be extended to all adults 16 and older on April 5. Most grocery stores with pharmacies are administering the vaccine, as well as new federally operated sites (Photo via Wikimedia Commons).

Starting on April 5, all Michigan residents age 16 and up will become eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. The new eligibility qualifications starting in April come one month before President Joe Biden's pledge to make every adult in the U.S. eligible for vaccination no later than May 1.

President Biden's pledge also comes with a plan to increase the number of places where Americans can get vaccinated. There will be more federal mass vaccination centers run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the military and other federal agencies.

For Michigan residents, the federally selected regional mass vaccination site will be at Ford Field in Detroit. The site will operate 12 hours a day with the capacity to administer six thousand doses daily. The vaccine is administered from Meijer at no cost and insurance is not required.

All Albion students are eligible to receive the vaccine because they currently reside and attend school in Michigan. Those interested and able to travel can sign up to receive the vaccination at Ford Field on the Meijer pharmacy registration page that is tailored to Michigan residents.

There are also vaccine distribution sites at Meijer pharmacies. Those looking for a closer Meijer vaccination site can register for an appointment at the Meijer in Jackson.

Because of Together Safely guidelines, Albion students who sign up and receive a vaccine appointment confirmation must fill out the off-campus travel form and get approved to leave campus.

Not all Albion students have the ability to travel that far off campus, and the college has not yet released information regarding how students can get vaccinated, even with the new vaccine qualifications.

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COVID-19 Restrictions Loosened in Michigan and on Campus

Sondra Sewell
Staff Writer

Three Albion College students play a game of spikeball on the quad while wearing masks. According to the updated regulations, the quad has a new maximum capacity of 150 individuals (Photo by Sondra Sewell).

At a COVID-19 briefing that took place on March 2, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced that Michigan state officials have decided to loosen COVID-19 restrictions. Restaurants, stores, gyms, entertainment venues and other establishments, including colleges, are affected by this change.

Kurt Jolly, a senior from Chelsea, is a member of the COVID-19 accountability committee on campus. The COVID-19 accountability committee is a group of students and faculty who meet weekly to review and update Albion College's COVID-19 rules and restrictions.

Jolly explained that while Michigan restrictions definitely impact campus restrictions, Albion College does not use them as a direct guide.

"As I'm sure every student has figured out at this point, our rules and regulations as Albion College are much more extensive than the ones Michigan-wide," Jolly said. "We must adhere to everything that Gov. Whitmer wants us to do, but we also have done a diligent job of having our own rules and regulations that have helped us keep our numbers on campus very low."

Continued on back.

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COVID-19 Restrictions Loosened in Michigan and on Campus Continued

Due to the gaps between state rules and college rules, only certain campus regulations will change. One set of campus protocols that has been updated in alignment with Gov. Whitmer's announcement is the outdoor gathering limits. This allows for increased maximum capacity in outdoor areas, such as 150 individuals in the quad and 25 individuals at the outdoor fire pits.

"Those limitations have been lifted a little bit, so there will be more ability to have, in terms of Greek life, more mixers outside, as well as gatherings outside for sporting events and other clubs and organizations," Jolly said.

As far as dining, restaurants in Michigan can now operate at 50% capacity as opposed to 25%. This could impact the restrictions currently placed upon designated eating spots on campus, such as Baldwin Hall and the Kellogg Center.

"As for Baldwin, they will eventually increase the number allowed in there," Jolly said. "I just don't know if people will actually be able to sit at the same table or if they're going to open up more tables around the facility."

Along with restaurants, bowling alleys are also cleared to open at 50% capacity. There is a desire among students for University Lanes in Albion to become one of the approved Together Safely businesses.

"I have not heard anything specifically about that, and it has not been brought up at our committee meetings, but I'm sure it'll be brought up this week because I just started hearing rumors about it over the last couple of days," Jolly said.

As restrictions begin to loosen on campus, the COVID-19 accountability committee stresses the importance of continuing to wear masks and practice social distancing; taking careful steps forward will prevent the need to take steps backward in the future.

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Opinion: Community Policing Doesn't Help an Apathetic Community

A group of students gather outside Delta Tau Delta fraternity for St. Patrick's Day festivities on Mar. 17. As students grow anxious a year since the pandemic began, mask wearing and mask enforcement has fallen (Photo by Sam Semerau).

Sam Semerau
Opinions Editor

Over winter break last December, I was given the opportunity of becoming a member of the Student COVID-19 Accountability Board. On the board, a handful of students convene with members of administration to provide feedback on how administration is handling their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to receive answers we students can bring back to our peers.

At an early meeting, the topic of community policing mask wearing came up. Administration was looking for ways to encourage students to police other students on their mask wearing. Ultimately, it largely came down to the administrators telling us, students, to call each other out when we see someone improperly wearing or not wearing a mask.

This immediately was worrisome to me. Firstly, we're a small school, but we're not that small. Early intervention with anti-maskers could be accusatory at the very least and dangerous at the most. The thought was terrifying.

The idea felt like administration was pushing the burden of obligation off of themselves and onto students. If it's the students' responsibilities to ensure everyone is wearing their masks properly, then administration cannot be faulted when no one does.

When I raised these concerns, I was met with an analogy from one of the top members of administration: If I'm in a dangerously high speeding car with someone, wouldn't it make sense for me to tell that person to slow down?

I was shocked into silence and didn't get a rebuttal at the time. Instead, I silently accepted this as an answer.

In the months since then, this cavalier response to my genuine concern will occasionally pop into my head. This is especially true in moments when I hear about maskless gatherings or I see people with masks beneath their noses in line at the Eat Shop. I have begun to deconstruct exactly why this felt like a false analogy to me.

For starters, I wouldn't be getting into a car with a stranger who I didn't trust to drive safely. Translating this from the analogy to real life, I feel plenty comfortable asking my friends to wear or adjust their mask.

My friends are all roughly of the same understanding as me when it comes to wearing a mask. In the rare instance that they would not be wearing a mask properly, I know they won't take offense to my request and they won't start an argument.

I can't say the same thing of a stranger.

Furthermore, the lack of police in this analogy is noticeable. Anyone who has driven on the highways between Jackson and Albion can tell you that if you are going a dangerous speed, you're going to get pulled over by a state trooper, regardless if there is someone else in the car telling you to slow down.

Instead, in this analogy, the campus operates without police officers pulling drivers over. Students are expected to police other students on their mask wearing and there remains little, if any, consequence for those who choose to go without it.

Instead, this leaves us with a community that is either apathetic towards mask wearing after enduring a full year of a pandemic or afraid of the consequences of causing conflict.

This is an unacceptable state to be in as the state of Michigan has doubled in positive cases over the last three weeks and the new COVID-19 strain has made its way onto Michigan State University's campus.

Administration needs to help relieve the burden of the students who already faithfully wear their masks and follow COVID-19 procedure. They need to step in and enforce mask wearing and give consequences for those who do not.

Students Reminisce on Their Last Day of "Normal"

Kenna Childress
Staff Writer

For many, March 2020 was the last month of normalcy before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. Now, a year later, the Albion community reflects back on when they first heard the announcement.

"The moment was weird. It was like time stopped," said Domonic McDonald, a junior from Albion. "It was an apocalyptic moment. We kind of depersonalized from real life."

Claire Nickerson, a sophomore from Battle Creek, said she remembered talking about the virus while in class. In addition to this, she remembered talking about what other colleges were doing at the time.

"I remember talking in my geology class about how U of M and MSU were going online, and I thought that wasn't going to happen to us. Those are big schools," said Nickerson.

Other students were holding gatherings or were hanging out in their dorm rooms when Albion's administration sent out the email telling them they needed to leave campus.

"I think we were at a mixer, all having a good time, then the next day we all got an email saying we had 48 hours to leave," said Nate Periat, a senior from Toledo, Ohio.

Some students remember watching how hard it was on their senior friends and the many emotions they experienced when they realized they would not be completing their senior year on campus.

"I remember getting an email about classes going online," said Hannah Erickson, a senior from Birmingham. "I was living with three other seniors at the time, and they were going through so many different emotions. It was really kind of night and day."

With COVID-19 being such a novel disease, many did not think it would become as serious as it has or last nearly as long.

"At the time I thought this was going to be a really short thing. I thought it was going to be serious but not as serious as it has turned out to be," said Nickerson.

In the year that the pandemic has continued, some students have had families affected by the pandemic or have even been affected by the virus themselves.

"My family has had it. I haven't had it, but my family has," said Periat. "I was just kind of surprised at how quickly it spread."

Similarly, McDonald did not expect the virus to hit so close to home.

"I kind of thought about it like Ebola," said McDonald, "I have lost a lot of people from it. I didn't expect my family members to pass from something so sudden. It doesn't care. It doesn't discriminate."

McDonald used to be on the track and field team, but with the pandemic at large, he did not feel comfortable competing and decided not to participate in sports this year. This is one of many difficult decisions students have made over the past year due to the virus.

"I miss it. I wish it wasn't the way it is now with the masks," said McDonald, "I'm not ignorant. I understand the reason why we need to wear masks, but it adds this level of stress there was not before. I want to be an athlete, but at the same time, I'm worrying about whether this person has Covid. Now do I have it? Am I good? Can I perform the same with my mask on? It was just too much."

Even first year student Bianca Chavez from Dallas said she remembered what it was like for her during her last few weeks of high school.

"It was the week before spring break, so we weren't really doing much in our classes and just reviewing for APs which were coming up after spring break," said Chavez, "At the time, I didn't really know the extent [of the virus]. I knew it was a real thing, but everyone kept saying it was like the flu. I thought maybe they'll give us two more weeks off for spring break, and then we just never went back."

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