

Midway U begins fall semester; masks required indoors

Bob Vlach, Woodford Sun, 2 September 2021

Enrollment continues to climb at Midway University as a new fall semester began Aug. 23. The academic year started as public health officials continue reporting high numbers of COVID-19 cases here and across Kentucky.

To limit the spread of the virus at Midway University, there is a campus-wide mask mandate – regardless of vaccination status, according to President Dr. John Marsden. He said everyone must wear a face covering when indoors.

Other strategies are being employed to keep students, faculty and staff healthy.

Before students moved into their dorms or returned to campus for their first day of classes, they were required to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test, said Marsden and Ellen Gregory, vice president of marketing and communications.

Gregory said students are also being educated about what they can do – social distancing and hand washing – to limit the spread.

“We have an incredibly-high vaccination rate among faculty and staff. And I can say it’s over 90 percent,” Marsden said. “We are still tracking student vaccination rates because they’re still coming in.”

The campus hosted a vaccination clinic last week and has another scheduled Sept. 14, and students are being strongly encouraged to get the shot, Marsden said. He said Midway University is also having weekly drawings for students, where they can win monetary incentives for being vaccinated.

In terms of athletics, Rusty Kennedy, Midway University’s vice president of admissions and athletics, said student-athletes are also being strongly encouraged to get vaccinated. And they are encouraged to wear a mask when not in the game, he said. He said coaches are asked to wear a mask and players are asked to wear masks while traveling together to games.

Spectators are currently being allowed at Midway’s home athletic competitions, but everyone must wear a mask indoors, Kennedy said. “Everything is day by day,” he added.

Thus far, Kennedy said student-athletes have been very good about informing their coaches or training staff when they are not feeling good, but “well beyond the vast majority” are not COVID, he said.

Student-athletes who are vaccinated must monitor their symptoms and receive a negative test result before rejoining teammates. Those who are not vaccinated must quarantine off campus to eliminate any additional exposure, Kennedy said.

Enrollment on rise

The traditional daytime student population on Midway University’s campus has steadily grown since the fall of 2016; from 239 students in the spring of 2016 – before Midway became a co-educational institution – to 687 students last fall, according to Marsden.

He said 740-something traditional daytime students (those who live on campus or commute) are enrolled this semester, but that doesn’t include online undergraduate, graduate, evening and dual-credit students. He said total enrollment at Midway University will be about 1,800 this semester.

Marsden cited affordability as one factor in the growth – “our tuition is still just under \$25,000, although there are opportunities for athletic and academic scholarships, which help bring the price down.” In addition to being “the most affordable” private college in Central Kentucky, Midway also has a large number of student-athletes, who may not have that opportunity at a larger university, he said.

Besides being affordable, Marsden said, “We have a beautiful and safe campus, which is important to families. But we’re not isolated ... Also, our mission is career-focused, so most of our majors are professional in nature and there’s a clear understanding of how your major will lead to some kind of career path.”

And even as student enrollment climbs, Gregory pointed out that Midway University’s faculty-to-student ratio remains low, with an average class size of 16 students. “Everybody knows everybody by name here,” she said. And about three-quarters of the traditional students are student-athletes, Marsden said.

“It does keep them involved... and they find a way to balance the two (academics and athletes),” said Kennedy. During the spring semester, he said over 500 student-athletes had a cumulative grade-point average of 3.22. “So they did a good job in the classroom as well as on the field. They are student-athletes,” he added.