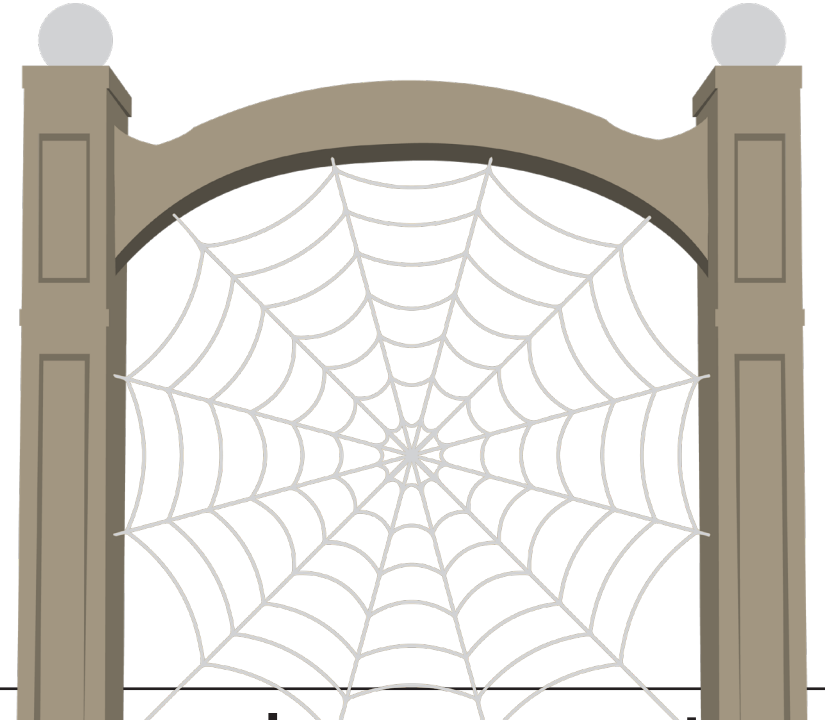




Take a look at all the masks around campus!

BREAKING FREE FROM COVID-19

DUSTING THE COBWEBS OFF A-STATE'S TRADITIONS



WHAT'S INSIDE

SPECIAL EDITION

2A: WHAT TO KEEP

3A: FACILITIES

3A: RED W.O.L.F. CENTER

4A: SGA

4A: STORIES CONTINUED

1B: RUGBY

1B: BASKETBALL

2B: STUDENT SPEAK

3B: POP PICK

3B: HOROSCOPES

4B: MASKS

ONLINE: MORE CONTENT

Campus prepares for return to full in-person and on-campus activity

KRISHNAN COLLINS
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Students, faculty and staff at Arkansas State University dealt with the meat of the coronavirus pandemic for three semesters and now those on campus can look forward to a fall 2021 semester with the promise of a little more normalcy on the horizon.

A-State Chancellor Dr. Kelly Damphousse announced in a March 19 email to students campus would be returning to full in-person and on-campus activity for the summer 2021 and fall 2021 semesters.

"I think our returning students will especially be grateful for the opportunity just to gather together in ways that we did in fall 2019 that we couldn't in fall 2020," Damphousse said.

In the email, Damphousse said he anticipates A-State will have the same proportion of in-person classes in fall 2021 as campus did in fall 2019.

"That's still the plan," Damphousse said. "This is a plan that actually comes from the faculty who were key in creating the Return to Learn Plan for 2020-21. Their assessment is we can return to in-person classes in the fall. That presumes a lot of things,

that the virus is more contained than it is now, that the number of people testing positive and in hospitals and ICUs continues to go down as it has been."

The Chancellor added if more and more people get vaccinated and the area continues on the trajectory it's on now, A-State will have a fall 2021 semester much more similar to fall 2019.

Full in-person, on-campus activity doesn't just apply to the classroom, but more events and traditions are set to return to campus.

"I think you'll see live, in-person student affairs activities as well," Damphousse said. "That includes things like rush for Greek Life. I think athletics will look a lot different as far as the number of fans being allowed to attend. Perhaps the band being able to play at halftime and spirit squads being allowed to be on the field and things like that. I think you'll see a move toward normalcy."

While Damphousse noted organizations like SAB and SGA did a great job of providing virtual events for students including guest speakers and activities, much more of those events will be in person next semester.

Events like Order of the Pack and Bid Day are set to be

in person while Heritage Plaza Lawn events like the Community Fair could also return to campus.

"What has happened both to faculty and students, I think we've gained a greater appreciation for our ability to do this, to meet together in person, to have class in person," Damphousse said. "Students have expressed to me a great desire to get back in the classroom. I think they'll be excited, I hope, about coming back to football games and athletic events and so on. But also to engage in campus culture and campus life in ways they didn't before."

Incoming freshmen coming to campus might carry a great desire and intrigue to see how traditional college life is after having the end of their junior year of high school and senior year turn mostly virtual.

Damphousse also said he thinks a lot about seniors on campus who weren't able to experience traditions over the past year and the current freshmen who had an unusual freshman year.

"We'll have to work really hard on our incoming freshmen to figure out ways to continue the traditions that maybe we lost a year and didn't have the chance to do," Damphousse said. "We have to think of

ways to reorient our current freshmen, who will be our returning sophomores who didn't do a lot of things we were able to do in fall 2019 but we'll be able to do this coming year."

There might be a formal orientation for returning freshmen in the fall, but if not, there will definitely be a message sent informing them of things available that were not available this past year.

While campus craves a return to normal, the pandemic has taught A-State how to bring certain opportunities to campus virtually that would have been harder otherwise.

Damphousse said sometimes people ask him whether A-State will keep anything that happened because of COVID-19. Zoom has become second nature to many around campus and allows for guests who can't come to Jonesboro, not because of COVID-19 but expenses and travel, to talk to students virtually.

"We might be able to bring someone in and have them perform for us or inform our students virtually," Damphousse said. "In other years, we wouldn't even have thought of doing a virtual event but now we might have some virtual events. It won't be because of COVID,

it'll be because of availability. The motivation won't be because of COVID, but having greater access to someone."

As things return to normal around campus, employment opportunities for students might increase. As more functions of campus return to normal hours and full operation, more students might be needed.

"I think we may see actually an increase in (student jobs) because we'll have more activities and more requirements for people working on campus," Damphousse said. "When we reduced the number of hours in the Red W.O.L.F. Center for example, we didn't need as many student workers there. But now that we'll be back to normal, we'll need more student workers there. This is just one example."

A-State employees who are not already back on campus will return to campus early this summer.

Employees who have been working remotely because of coronavirus protocol accommodations have been informed their category three status under state guidelines expires on May 17.

CONTINUED:
NORMAL, 4A

The COVID-19 vaccine is a key step on the road to return to normal

COURTNEY EDWARDS
NEWS WRITER

Chancellor Dr. Kelly Damphousse announced in March A-State was preparing for full, in-person campus activities during the summer and fall 2021 terms.

Zoom meetings and Blackboard Collaborate can soon become a distant memory to some. Damphousse said he was confident to "...resume many of the activities—academic, athletic and community—that define campus life." Student vaccination

reservations filled almost instantly, and most faculty and staff members received vaccines weeks ago. Confidence seems to radiate through campus.

"I'm very confident that the reopening this fall will go smoothly," said Dr. Shane Speights, dean of New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine at A-State. An important factor into how safe it is to reopen campus is vaccinations. Speights said it was still safe to have in-person activities if not everyone was vaccinated. He did, however, provide a few precautions to consider.

"Individuals who are fully vaccinated can meet together in small groups," Speights said. "Medium sized and large sized groups are still recommended to wear masks and social distance."

As more people continue to be vaccinated, those recommendations may change according to Speights. It's still advised to follow CDC guidelines as they change, even for those who are already vaccinated.

For now, masks are still being utilized at A-State. Speights said he still would encourage people to wear masks in large group settings.

Part of this is because the vaccines don't protect from all the variants.

"It depends on the vaccine, but we know the Pfizer and Moderna vaccine fully protect against the U.K. variant," Speights said. "They offer decent protection against the Brazilian variant. The protection is reduced probably six to eight-fold for the South African variant."

Research on this continues to update every day, and Speights said it was important to stay informed.

Speights explained that even with newer variants of COVID-19, so much more

is known about the virus now than a year ago. Precautions such as wearing masks and hand hygiene play an important role in keeping cases under control.

Research on how to treat patients with coronavirus has improved recovery rates. Normally, ICU patients on ventilators lie on their back, but according to Speights, research has shown coronavirus patients benefit more from lying on their stomach.

CONTINUED:
SPEIGHTS, 4A