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University of Washington Grapples With Uptick in COVID-19

Ashley Hagar, Staff Reporter

Since the COVID-19 outbreak began, the University of Washington (UW) has had a total of 613 positive cases as of Oct. 10. Only 61 of those have been reported within the last week. In comparison, Seattle University has had 28 total cases since March, with only one current active off-campus case.

On Oct. 6, the Vice President of student life at the University of Washington, Denzil Suite and the Director of Public Health in Seattle, Patty Hayes, co-wrote a message to all members of greek life at UW. In the letter, Suite and Hayes emphasized the importance of limiting gatherings to five masked people who should remain socially distanced, even if they live together. Additionally, they encouraged students to enroll in a randomized testing program if they would be on-campus or at any UW facilities.

Similar to Seattle U, UW has specific guidelines regarding dining halls and on-campus housing that students must follow. The custodial staff cleans public areas daily at both campuses, if not more, depending on the space and exposure level of a particular area. At Seattle U, wearing a mask is required both indoors and outdoors, even if physical distancing is in place. UW's Housing and Food Services COVID Information page lays out a set of rules for those on campus.

"You must wear a face covering indoors wherever other people are present. This includes wearing one in common areas such as hallways, stairways, restrooms and elevators. You must also wear a face covering outside whenever it may not be possible to stay six feet away from other people," UW Housing and Food Services wrote.

In addition to the other COVID-19 precautions, the UW launched the Husky PACK Pledge, which stands for Personal responsibility, Awareness, Choice and Kindness. These four sections of the PACK encourage following public health guidelines, educating oneself about the spread of COVID-19, choosing to follow safe practices, consistent cleaning of shared spaces and treating others with respect during this challenging time. By committing to the Husky PACK Pledge, students will be able to prevent further outbreaks and limit the spread of COVID at UW.

In response to the COVID outbreak on Greek Row in late June, the Interfraternity Council (IFC) adapted new regulations that will go into effect until Nov. 3, at the earliest. These policies include prohibiting all social events that may violate the state's phased reopening plan. The President of the IFC at the UW, Erik Johnson, wrote a statement to The Spectator.

"We have every intention of perpetually extending these policies indefinitely (Standing Rules must be voted on monthly per IFC Legislative Policy)," Johnson said.



Kim Nucum

As of Oct 8, six of the 25 IFC Fraternities have positive cases of COVID-19. Of these six fraternities, three of them have each had one active case. Johnson elaborated in his statement.

“Looking at these numbers and how they compare to the Summer, when 15 IFC Fraternities had members test positive for COVID-19, you can see that the policies we implemented (both on an IFC level and within each chapter) have drastically reduced spread,” Johnson said.

He continued to describe the work that the IFC has done to coordinate with campus and municipal health officials.

“Our chapters have developed COVID-19 Safety Plans in conjunction with the UW Department of Environmental Health and Safety that provide guidance on mitigation and isolation for each specific chapter facility, worked closely with Public Health for Seattle and King County to contact trace and determine the most effective ways to educate members on the most up-to-date guidelines, and further limited the spread of COVID-19 in their facilities through additional internal policies and enforcement mechanisms.”

Johnson explained that the UW is working to prevent further spread on campus, as well as in neighborhoods surrounding various campus and facility locations. The outbreaks that have occurred at the UW are due to people not following the necessary precautions or abiding by public safety guidelines.

According to the current IFC Standing Rules, any fraternity that violates the policy regarding recruitment may be fined or suspended from future social events. Other violations may also result in a fine or loss of privilege to live in a IFC facility.

Seattle U has worked hard to avoid outbreaks from occurring on campus. The College of Nursing has a Population Health class, where students are able to fulfill internship credits by working with the Student Health Center, Public Safety, the Office of Wellness and Health promotion and other departments on campus. Like the UW, Seattle U has also partnered with various health organizations, including Seattle King County Public Health, the state governor’s office and the state Department of Health to develop the prevention plan on campus and limit the spread of COVID-19.

Director of the Student Health Center at Seattle U, Tara Hicks, wrote a statement to The Spectator emphasizing the importance of monitoring symptoms, social distancing, wearing a face covering and being honest with Seattle U Public Safety if questioned in order to mitigate the spread of the virus.

“Ongoing surveillance testing has been running through the Student Health Center as well as the Sports Medicine department in Athletics and so far, we have not had any positive results and we hope this continues,” Hicks wrote.

Seattle U is also providing a free flu shot clinic to students, as health officials have stated the importance of getting a flu shot this year to limit the necessity of hospital care.

Hicks reiterated that Seattle U is working to prohibit outbreaks through their surveillance testing program.

“The SHC’s goal is to test 10% of our student population on a weekly basis who live on campus or come to campus during fall quarter (Athletics has a separate testing plan). The samples are chosen randomly, so don’t be surprised if you are selected more than once during a quarter,” Hicks said.

Seattle U and UW continue to work to curb COVID-19 cases on their respective campuses. Whether they will be able to do so effectively will be reliant on institutional policies, as well as the active participation of student populations in preventing the spread of the virus.