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Seattle University Updates Cleaning and Housing Plans in Response to COVID-19

Logan Gilbert, Investigative Editor

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic producing the highest daily cases in the U.S., it has become more important than ever to properly clean and sanitize the Seattle University campus. With the new changes to class structure and the guidelines from the King County Health Department, the university has updated its policies and invested in the health of the community.

With this reduction in student enrollment and the introduction of online classes, Facilities and Maintenance have changed their plans for cleaning the Seattle U campus. In order to ensure the safety of the campus community, cleaning and sanitization has been increased, especially in high traffic areas. This includes the bathrooms of the residence halls and dining areas on campus.

One of the new additions to current cleaning protocols is a cart with an electrostatic sanitizing sprayer, which the staff uses to sanitize areas quickly multiple times a day. For Robert Schwartz, the Associate Vice President of Facilities Services, these are necessary steps that need to be taken in order to keep residents safe.

“I think that the cleaning schedule we have is enough to prevent an outbreak,” Schwartz said. “With only ten cases, I think that has shown we are diligently doing what we can to keep our community safe.”

Another important aspect the facilities team looked at was ventilation systems, which King County Health suggests should have three air changes per hour, or the number of times the building completely cycles the air. The team then identified which buildings could reach these standards and marked them as suitable for use and in-person instruction.

One of the biggest policy changes, though, comes in the form of reduced housing capacity to one student per dorm room, leaving 950 students as the maximum in university run housing. Currently there are 715 students living in Seattle U operated housing, with another 205 in Douglas and 285 in Vi Hilbert apartments.

Compared to the estimated 2,300 students that would ordinarily be living on campus, there is a huge reduction— in part because Chardin and Yobi residence halls have been converted into quarantine and isolation spaces.

Chardin Hall is reserved for students that might be exposed to COVID-19 or may be symptomatic but not directly exposed, while the Yobi space is used to isolate confirmed cases. With colleges across the country experiencing shutdowns as massive outbreaks of the virus spread amongst college students, Seattle U has a plan for combating the potential for a rampant spread. Alvin Sturdivant, Vice President of Student Development, attested to Seattle U’s complex plans amid uncertain circumstances for the 2020-2021 academic year.



“We definitely have contingency plans that have been developed in the event we have a significant surge in COVID cases,” Sturdivant said. “Those plans would give us the ability to close campus in a reasonably quick way, similar to what happened at the end of winter quarter.”

Overall, it is up to students to follow the rules that the school has set and Tim Albert, the Associate Director of Housing, said that he thinks people need to continue to be cautious about the virus.

“I think a lot of our students are taking this very seriously,” Albert said. “People need to keep in mind that if you choose to break rules, you aren’t just putting yourself at risk, you are putting everyone around you at risk.”

As to the logic behind university openings amidst a global pandemic, it comes down to providing a place for students that need to have an environment to do their studies properly. This includes those who need in person instruction as a part of their classes, but also those for whom campus is where they get the most done.

“Developmentally there are a range of needs in our community, so getting access to the tools they need to be successful was very important,” Sturdivant added, alluding to the significance of supporting students who need it now more than ever.

The university is also facing massive debts with their income coming largely from student housing, which has been reduced. This reduction in the number of people on campus has caused a reduction in the amount of areas that Facilities need to clean, but at the same time, they are threatened with another round of furloughs deemed necessary to save money.

“With the university’s decision for most staff and faculty to work remotely, we can get by with a much lighter touch,” Schwartz said. “We are going through a pretty significant budget impact that we are having to figure out still.”

With 1.3 million dollars budgeted for updating facilities and maintenance for COVID-19, this seems to be the cost of doing business in a global pandemic. Most of the cost comes from the wipes, sanitizer stations and PPE that are required for those on campus, but with the theory that coronavirus could be a yearly event like the flu, this investment could be important for the school in the future.