Dear Students,

We’ve been together on campus for about a week. I’m sure you’re aware that some schools haven’t reached even that small milestone — and I am compelled to remind you that Bucknell is just as vulnerable to ending our semester early. As the image below shows, we know that the next few days are critical to maintaining our early success.

Many colleges and universities did not open for in-person instruction this fall. My decision to reopen Bucknell’s campus was based largely on three factors: the latest science behind CoV infection, epidemiology and what we know about CoV PCR tests; the implementation of a robust testing program; and my trust that you would adhere to new guidelines designed to protect community health and safety. We allocated significant resources to do this, because I believed that you really wanted to be here. I’m still trying to believe that.

Yet less than one week into classes, we are already receiving calls from people who are dismayed and angered by the thoughtless behavior of some — ranging from walking around town without face coverings to having large off-campus gatherings without social distancing. Our Lewisburg neighbors state, correctly, that they have a right to live in a safe community in
which students are accountable for their actions. Our faculty state, correctly, that they have a right to expect students to follow simple safety directives when they have made the decision to risk their own health by teaching in person during the pandemic. And many students have reached out to say that some of their classmates aren’t taking this pandemic seriously.

*Living in residence and attending in-person classes is a privilege, not a right.* This privilege is earned, but also must be maintained, and your choices have consequences. You can honor the Community Responsibility Agreement you signed this summer and stay on campus, or you can return home. The choice is yours. Those who fail to respect their responsibility to our community during the pandemic will find that the student conduct code and local governmental restrictions will be enforced.

If outbreaks of the virus compromise the ability of our faculty and staff to safely deliver our residential educational experience, or threaten the health and well-being of our Lewisburg neighbors, or burden our local medical facilities and resources, I will end in-person instruction to protect our community, just as I did in March. I truly do not want to do that, but I will if the facts demand such action.

I urge you to think about what going home would mean for our seniors, who could well miss out on Commencement on the Quad, and would have to conduct their job searches from home. And for our first-years, who have yet to experience the Bucknell traditions we know and love — such as Candlelighting and Matriculation. I recognize that it’s tempting to believe that you are safe in the “Bucknell Bubble.” But no place is safe from COVID-19, and some of you may mistakenly believe that negative tests mean that you are in the clear. All it takes to transmit or become infected with the virus is one walk through campus without a mask. One gathering in a residence hall without physical distancing. One party. One Super.

You were admitted to Bucknell based, in part, on your critical thinking ability. Draw upon that ability, and make the right choices — the ones that will help our campus remain open through the semester, and the ones that will make all Bucknellians proud, now and in the years to come. We need each other, now.

Sincerely,

John C. Bravman
President