

As we get set to embark on another extraordinary opportunity here at Grand Canyon University with the opening today of a COVID-19 vaccination site on campus, I can't help but think back on what a historic year this has already been.

Fall Enrollment Growth

It started in the fall, when we welcomed the largest incoming class in our history. While enrollment has dropped 10-20% at other universities, GCU exceeded its goal of 8,000 new students by welcoming more than 8,200 incoming students to campus – bringing total enrollment of ground-based students to 23,000. Of that total, 5,000 took advantage of the opportunity to complete their coursework 100% online in the fall semester. That remote-learning number is about 3,500 this semester.

Online enrollment has also increased significantly, surpassing 90,000 students, with about half of those studying at the graduate level.

Employment Growth

As a university, we experienced no layoffs of employees due to the pandemic. In fact, we added more than 400 positions in 2020 and were blessed to still be able to provide annual pay increases to all employees, many of whom have transitioned to working from home.

After adjusting successfully to finish the spring 2020 semester remotely at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, our team was faced with the daunting task of figuring out how to operate a university – academically, socially, spiritually and athletically – for the entire fall semester while keeping the campus community as safe as possible from the coronavirus. What our students, faculty and staff accomplished last fall was, quite simply, a triumph of the human spirit. I'm convinced that doesn't happen without God's guiding hand on our university. Our faith in Him unites us in ways that bring about a spirit of collaboration and innovation toward our primary focus as an institution – our students' success.

COVID-19 Cases On Campus

We finished the fall semester with only 30 active cases of COVID-19 among our students and today have a total of 54 active cases. While one positive case is one too many, our mitigation efforts at preventing the spread are making a significant difference. As the vaccine becomes more widespread in the coming months, we are hopeful a new normal will take shape as we navigate our way out of the pandemic.

Engineering Program Accreditation

During the fall semester, we also received the news that our newly-launched engineering programs had attained accreditation in the shortest time period possible. Even while awaiting accreditation, those engineering programs grew to more than 900 students. With accreditation complete, we expect even more interest in those programs.

Athletic Success

Athletically, we saw two major accomplishments. First, our two new basketball coaches are already putting their stamps on the programs. The men's team, under Bryce Drew, is undefeated in conference play (4-0) and is off to a 10-3 start. The women's team, under Molly Miller, is 9-2 overall and 1-1 to start conference play. Their faith, character and leadership of young men and women is infectious and can be seen both on and off the court.

Second, GCU's leadership team played a big part in the recent expansion of the Western Athletic Conference, in which we added four high-quality academic and athletic institutions from Texas and another from Utah. These additions will make the WAC a seriously competitive mid-major conference located in high-growth areas of the country – primarily Texas, Arizona and Utah. The impact in basketball will be seen immediately, while the locations of schools in warm-weather climates will also allow sports such as baseball, softball, soccer, beach volleyball, tennis and golf to flourish.

Campus Growth

We are also in the midst of the largest construction year we have ever had. Three new apartment-style residence halls – dubbed The Rivers – will be surrounded by our largest parking garage, a new swimming pool and encompass amenities such as a mini-Student Union, fitness center, arcade, Panera Bread restaurant and Nekter Juice Bar. The residence halls will house up to 2,000 upperclassmen and be completed by Aug. 1 in order to accommodate 9,000 new students next year, which would bring campus enrollment to around 24,000.

COVID-19 Community Support

And, finally, after a fall semester in which we produced PPE equipment for many of our partners and then opened up our commercial hub at 27th Avenue and Camelback Road to provide a COVID-19 testing site for the public, we're taking that a step further beginning today. The 27th Avenue site has become a Point Of Dispensing (POD) for the COVID-19 vaccine through a collaboration with the Maricopa County Public Health Department. With the help of roughly 900 student, faculty and staff volunteers per week, the goal is to administer 1,000 vaccines a day to people in our community. We will also be the only POD in Maricopa County to offer walk-through service, making the vaccinations available to the most vulnerable of our population who lack a vehicle and rely on public transportation or a shuttle in order to get vaccinated.

It's an extension of our broader initiatives to bring prosperity to our community and eliminate inequalities in our diverse inner-city neighborhood by bringing new businesses and jobs to the area, increasing home values through our Habitat for Humanity home renovation partnership, improving neighborhood safety through a \$2.2 million initiative with the City of Phoenix, and offering free tutoring to K-12 students to ensure they have scholarship opportunities and access to higher education.

When historians look back on this unprecedented time, they'll no doubt see the devastation and death that COVID-19 has wrought on our families, friends and neighbors. I'm convinced they'll also see the faith and spirit of people working together to make a difference – and I couldn't be more proud that GCU is at the forefront of those efforts.

Sincerely,

Brian Mueller

President, Grand Canyon University