

16th October 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

RBC essentially is complete, in a student sense, for this academic year! We rejoice that we have been able to come together as a full UWC community: 100 second-year students and 96 first-year students on campus, travelling here from 86 countries. Of course, our national diversity is only a tiny measure of our UWC-ness, but in Covid-19 times I think it is a triumph for people to come together, safely, from so many places!

Earlier this week we engaged in an Interfaith Special Focus Day (SFD), the first SFD of the year. There are no formal classes on SFDs and a full alternative programme is drawn up. I was moved by the willingness of so many students and staff to step forward, to lead and participate in Seminars, Discussions and Workshops, in a sense to make themselves vulnerable by sharing what for many is a core and sometimes private aspect of their identity. The opening plenary focused on the concept and practice of forgiveness. The Seminars explored the core beliefs of a wide range of faiths, especially those represented at RBC. These were followed by discussions on the intersection between social issues and faiths. In a second plenary session we were challenged in the commonality of the call to compassion and the care of others – doubly appropriate as RBC is a WeltEthos/Global Ethic school as part of our particular UWC identity. The workshops introduced us to various (often cultural) aspects of the practices of faith groups. And the final plenary had performances, final reflections and messages of peace.

There were aspects to the SFD that were different because of Covid-19: our guest speakers needed to remain separated from the school community and could not participate in more than their formal scheduled contribution. We could not invite participation from other schools. Singing performances needed to be recorded in Covid-19 – safe circumstances and then presented by video as we do not allow sung performances in the Auditorium. But in all essential aspects this Interfaith SFD was just as rich in discovery and engagement as those in previous years.

The essence of UWC need not be lost because of Covid-19 precautions.

The steep rise again in Covid-19 infections in Freiburg and in Germany needs to be acknowledged and responded to. Currently students still are allowed off-campus in the surrounding forest, countryside and in the quieter, nearby parts of Freiburg. They remain allowed to frequent “outside” restaurants, cafés and the like, and a nearby shopping centre where I remain confident in the infection-control measures that are taken. Having observed many students off-campus, I am confident in their sense of responsibility in wearing masks where required. Special permission is granted for individuals having good reason (often medical) to attend appointments elsewhere. Regulations published yesterday will further limit the range of possibilities for CAS, Tutor and Class groups being allowed to go to other places, even under supervision.

Yesterday I read an official flyer from Japan with an approach which could be summarized as: avoid the three Cs. Avoid **Closed Spaces** with poor ventilation; avoid **Crowded places** with many people nearby; avoid **Close-contact settings** such as close-range conversations – and especially avoid where any of these “Cs” intersect. This is a good summary of how we at RBC try to interact with the wider world and in staff/student engagement.

As Rektor, I hope to be able to continue allowing students off-campus, into contexts where the risks are much lower than in general social engagement in these parts. In Covid-19 terms it is likely to be a long, difficult Autumn and Winter. It is possible that Covid-19 infection rates will remain high (or periodically high) until at least March/April 2021. Of course if RBC prevented students from leaving campus at this stage, it would further reduce the possibility of students becoming infected with Covid-19. But to be in lockdown for 5 or 6 months would leave most people exhausted – and there is significant personal and institutional risk also in exhaustion. (At breakfast this morning a 2nd year student reminded me that some of his best days as a 1st year student were during the March to May lockdown. The situation is challenging, but not all gloom!)

Fall (Autumn) Break

As advertised, the Fall Break starts on the evening of Friday 23rd October, and students who leave for the break need to return to RBC by the evening of Sunday 1st November. During this period, all Student Houses will remain open and catering services will continue. Full provision is made for all students who remain resident on campus.

Yesterday the Federal and State governments in Germany called on all citizens to avoid unnecessary domestic travel to and from areas with high numbers of infections. Additionally, previously I advised students to be cautious about leaving Germany during the Fall Break, not being sure whether national borders including within the EU will remain open. That sense of caution continues; RBC cannot be responsible if students find themselves unable to return to Freiburg. RBC is not equipped to have most students on campus and in class and at the same time to support online classes for students unable to return to campus. A further consideration is that because RBC now is full, *RBC cannot provide quarantine / isolation facilities to students returning from a short holiday*. In light of new realities I will modify slightly and in the direction of practicality my earlier instructions to students: **RBC requires that if you travel beyond Freiburg, you are required to produce a PCR test result demonstrating that you are Covid-19 negative, a test result that is less than 48 hours old, before being allowed back on campus. That test may be undertaken anywhere in the EU, Switzerland, the UK or Norway.** If your test result is not yet available, you will need to remain off-campus, not with a RBC host family. (*Please note that the Federal or State Government may have or issue more stringent requirements before the 1st November.*) We also need to stress the need for responsibility for those who do travel for the Fall break: to exercise Covid-19 precaution especially in social situations.

Winter Break

With the rapid developments and somewhat uncertain nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is too early for RBC to give firm advice on travel. At this stage we cannot know what travel will be allowed by the Authorities (or possible). Clearly there is higher risk to plans to travel beyond Europe – and especially to being able to return to Germany.

Traditionally students either spend much of their “Christmas / New Year” holiday at home or with friends in Europe, or with RBC-organized Host Families. Please be assured that RBC will make adequate arrangements for and with all students who remain in these parts over Winter.

With best wishes,



Laurence Nodder
Rektor

UWC Robert Bosch College
laurence.nodder@uwcrobertboschcollege.de