

# news

## AU plans to return to a “new normal” in the fall semester

**EVAN LAUX**  
News Editor

On the week of March 8, Ashland University announced plans to considerably expand face-to-face activities and instruction for the fall 2021 term.

The statement comes amid infection rates continually dropping and plans for the vaccination of the campus community. Slowly but surely, Ashland University is returning to a sense of normal.

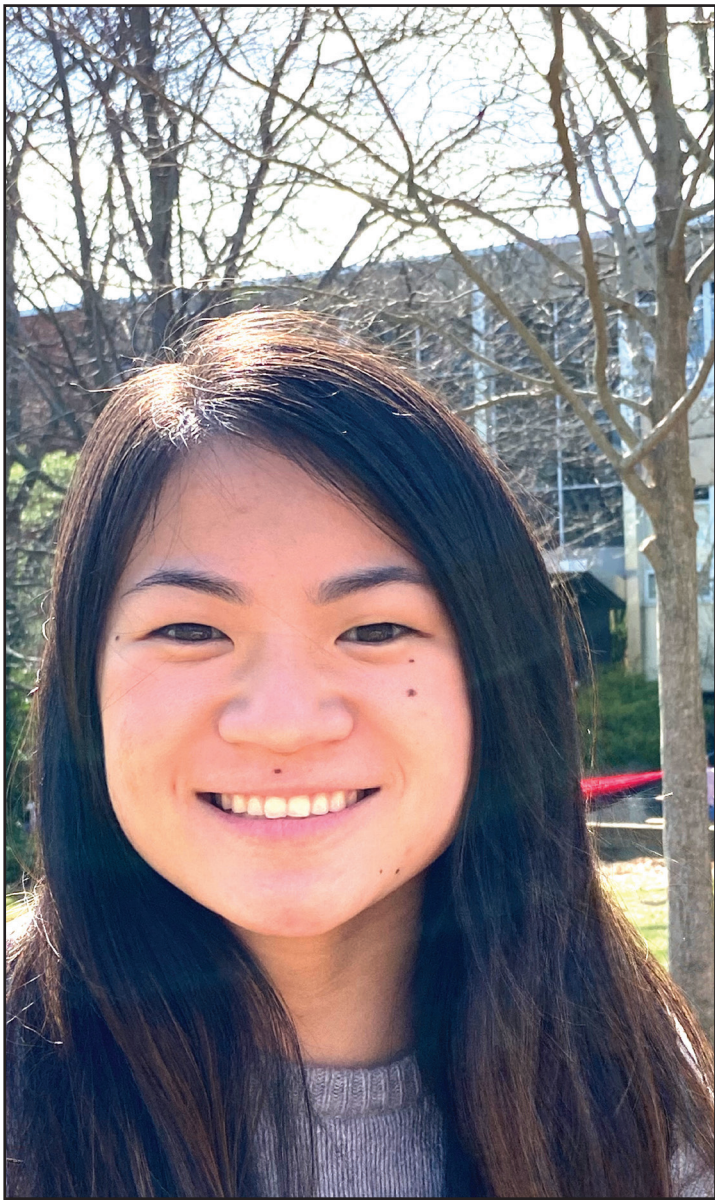
In the announcement, AU President Dr. Carlos Campo explained that the university’s “intent is to return to 2019 practices as much as possible.”

While AU acknowledges that conditions are always subject to change in current times, the plan is to slowly institute cautious and safe step-down procedures to the current coronavirus protocols and restrictions. Limited mask wearing, symptom monitoring, testing and quarantine/isolation protocols will likely continue as necessary during the transitional period.

Most recently, the university dropped the requirement to wear masks outside on campus while socially distanced. Indoors, masks are still required.

“I think it’s definitely progress and something worth celebrating,” Covid Coordinator Elise Riggle said. “When you haven’t been able to walk through the campus and breathe fresh air in so long, it just feels amazing.”

Campo said that he has already noticed a shift in atmosphere on campus.



**EVAN LAUX**

Students and faculty are no longer required to wear masks outside when on campus.

“It’s funny because just the other day, a beautiful sunny day, there were some students out in the quad and they were loud, remarkably

loud,” Campo said. “They were just enjoying life and I thought to myself ‘it shouldn’t feel that strange to have students in the quad again,’

but it really did, and it was wonderfully strange.”

Riggle says that the move to lessened Covid-19 protocols is only possible because of students’ continued compliance to the AU Stronger Together Safer Together Covid-19 response initiative.

While AU has stayed open for the entirety of the 2020-2021 school year, many other schools have shut down or suffered similar alterations to

The all classes to online learning in late October last year, and the Ohio State University requires all students living in residence buildings to complete a saliva test weekly. Failure to comply with any testing may result in a loss of access to non-residential spaces and a report to Student Conduct.

“I really think that’s a testament to the students here – that there’s no consequence to not showing up, but they still do,” Riggle said. “It just shows that people are happy to be here under the circumstances and although it stinks, everyone is trying to do the best they can and be safe. That’s what being an Ashland Eagle is.”

AU now has plans to administer vaccinations to the campus community, hopefully by the end of the semester. Students will not be required to get the vaccine, but are heavily encouraged.

Riggle adds that while AU is officially an approved site for vaccinations, there are many unknowns. The university is unsure when they will receive the vaccines, how many they will get, and what type

of vaccines they are (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Janssen [Johnson and Johnson]).

“We also know that if we give the first dose, the expectation is that we’ll get the second dose,” Riggle said. “And we know that the last day of classes is Apr. 30 so we need to give the first dose by March 30th, and any of our traditional students won’t be eligible until March 29.”

The Ashland County Health Department also recently announced its next wave of vaccination clinics, with eligibility opening to ages 16 and older after March 29, with the scheduling underway for a clinic Friday, April 2, from 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. at UH Samaritan.

Further information about changing Covid-19 protocols and vaccinations will be sent to AU students over the coming weeks, with a more defined look into the fall semester being announced in early April.

“We are leaving it up to individuals to decide if they want the vaccine, but just consider that if we could get to a 70% or higher threshold, I think in a sense we could be in an Ashland bubble,” Campo said. “And really as we’ve done really well even with Covid in our mix, how great would it be if we could get to the fall and know we’ve got a sort of herd immunity and we’re close to being back to normal?”

## Six faculty members awarded promotions

**LAYNA ROSS**  
Reporter

Ashland University recently promoted six faculty members and offered Dr. Gwen Hullman tenure as well as a promotion to professor.

During the most recent meeting of the Ashland University Board of Trustees, Dr. Diane Bonfiglio, Dr. Nicholas Johnson, Dr. Amy Klinger, Dr. Jill Matthes-Baxter, Dr. Jackie Owens, in addition to Dr. Gwen Hullman, received promotions.

Dr. Diane Bonfiglio, an Ashland native and AU Alumna, received a promotion from associate professor to professor of psychology. Bonfiglio has been a part of the Ashland University faculty since 2009 and currently teaches courses in introductory psychology, adolescence and health psychology.

Bonfiglio is appreciative of the AU Board of Trustees for the promotion and the opportunity to stay in her hometown.

“I graduated from Ashland High School, Ashland University, and I am able to be near family,” Bonfiglio said. “A lot of the values of Ashland University align with my values, and it feels like home.”

Dr. Nicholas Johnson, who joined the Ashland faculty in

2015, received a promotion from assistant professor to associate professor of chemistry. Johnson credits his achievement to his department and his passion for teaching.

“I have a great department that has supported me throughout my time here at AU,” he said. “I am excited to be promoted and continue to do what I love to do, which is teach students.”

Dr. Amy Klinger, director of the Educational Leadership Program and chair of the Doctoral Studies and Advanced Programs, was promoted from associate professor to professor. Klinger is one of the country’s foremost experts in school safety and security and serves as director of programs for the Educator’s School Safety Network, a national non-profit organization that specializes in education-based training and resources for violence prevention and crisis response in schools.

Dr. Jill Matthes-Baxter, serves as assessment coordinator and teaches courses on Pediatrics, Genetics and Nursing Concepts. Matthes-Baxter’s was promoted from assistant professor to associate professor of Nursing. When deciding to come to AU, Matthes-Baxter took into account the motto, “Accent on the Individual.”

“I love the small, community feel that Ashland has to offer,” Matthes-Baxter said. “A lot of hard work has gone into this and it is wonderful to celebrate with other faculty that feel like family.”

Dr. Jackie Owens was promoted from associate professor to professor. Owens is the director of AU’s RN-to-BSN program, and has given international, national and regional presentations on topics related to nursing education. Owens is also the Editor-in-Chief of OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing; scholarly journal of the American Nurses Association.

Owens came to Ashland as a professional instructor of nursing in 2003, long before AU had a College of Nursing and Health Sciences. She graduated in 2001 from the AU post licensure RN-to-BSN program and her experiences as a non-traditional student changed her life. When she was offered a position at AU, she was excited to work with the nursing faculty and teach nurses who shared many of the same challenges she faced, such as balancing work, studies and family.

“I was beyond thrilled for the opportunity to begin my career in nursing education at Ashland University because I knew firsthand



**SUBMITTED BY: DIANE BONFIGLIO**

Dr. Diane Bonfiglio, Professor of Psychology.

the quality of the faculty and the post licensure nursing program,” Owens said. “I also appreciated the difference that the accent on the individual made in my decision to earn a BSN, and go on to graduate school for an MSN and eventually a PhD.”

Dr. Gwen Hullman currently serves as chair of the Department of Communication Studies. Hullman was promoted from associate

professor to professor and received tenure. She has received multiple teaching awards and nominations from the National Communication Association, the University of Nevada, Case Western Reserve University and Kent State University.

## AU correctional education program continues to grow

**MASON SAVOIA**  
Reporter

Ashland University’s Correctional Education Program has continued to grow steadily in enrollment numbers from the day it was established in 1964. The program, which allows for incarcerated individuals to learn from inside correctional facilities, has broadened its scope from Ohio and now is used in 100 facilities in 13 states.

The desire for this kind of program has grown recently, with upwards of 4,000 students enrolled online, according to Denise Justice, executive director of cor-

rectional education operations.

According to the fall census enrollment numbers of 2019, AU had around 2,470 students enrolled in the Prison Outreach program — this, compared to 2020’s number of 3,518, is showing that the program continues to experience continuous growth.

Justice said that the program has adjusted well to the coronavirus pandemic.

“I’ve been involved at Ashland and the DRC site at the time when we first started bringing in [correctional] education into Ohio. If we’re used to face-to-face classes then we have to do one online, it’s a bit of a learning curve.” Justice

said. “We were already entirely online.”

Because of the preexisting structure of AU’s Correctional Education Program, more sites and facilities are able to be opened up over time. New staff is hired for the influx of new students and sites created typically.

“Because of the way that our program is designed, because it’s the online format, we hire site directors to each site whose job is to fill in the pieces-parts students need to get enrolled,” Justice said. “It’s not more difficult because of its design. As long as we have this framework, we know about this, that, and the other. It’s really

no big deal. That’s why we’re so flexible.”

Even with this flexibility, however, the program is not looking to expand this semester or the next.

“We always have plans to add states or facilities to existing states,” Justice said “Right at this point in time, we are not doing expansion in the summer. That’s kind of more [in the] timeline later on.”

There is consideration for potential expansion in the 2021 fall semester.

Otherwise, AU’s Correctional Education Program is ready to add more to the educational process for those enrolled through the

sites. This includes upgrades to the courses inmates can take, as well as the tools and devices they may use to broaden their education.

“Every semester we make little tweaks to our processes like the rest of campus,” Justice said. “We have some new things coming on. New slate or software or even planners.”

“Some of the things being implemented in Ashland as a whole are going to be improvements in our program too. We want to take a look at retention and enrollment. As we have more bells and whistles, we have more that we can do.”