

Liberty University to Comply With Government Regulations for COVID-19

Virginia's governor on Monday ordered all higher education institutions to halt any in-person instruction amid the coronavirus pandemic, a move likely directed at Liberty University, which initially declined to stop all on-campus teaching.

The evangelical college in Lynchburg led by President Jerry Falwell Jr. has faced intense criticism over its decision to welcome students back to campus last week after their spring break.

As of Monday, the only in-person teaching taking place was flight instructing, and that was going to be suspended to comply with the governor's order, said Liberty spokesman Scott Lamb.

At least three Liberty students have been tested for COVID-19, the school said in a statement Monday. One of those, a recent graduate who was taking additional online classes while living in the area with family, tested positive. One test was negative and one was pending, the statement said. Lynchburg currently has four confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to the latest information available from the state Department of Health.

Falwell, one of President Donald Trump's earliest and most ardent high-profile supporters, has generally characterized concerns about the virus as overblown. He has accused the news media of stoking fear and suggested coverage was politically motivated to hurt the president.

The university has said it will comply with all applicable

governmental directives and guidance concerning COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus that has crippled economies and upended daily life around much of the world.

But it also said two week ago that certain programs such as aviation, osteopathic medicine and nursing, and certain types of performance classes, like labs, could not be offered online, and that students could only take them in person. College officials said at the time that they would ensure no classes had more than 100 people.

Eli Best, a sophomore engineering major from Alexandria in northern Virginia, said he went home for spring break and returned to campus because he had class projects that he thought needed to be finished and required the use of the on-campus machine shop.

"I didn't see any other way to complete them," he said.

Best said Monday that all the shops and equipment he needed had since been shut down, and he returned home.

Northam urged Falwell last week to rethink "his message that invites and encourages students to return to campus." Liberty responded by accusing Northam of making "false accusations."

City officials and the top local public health official have fielded complaints from concerned residents and Liberty parents about the school's response.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. {eo}

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