

Rhodes Community:

Students, thank you for submitting your letter on November 28, raising a number of concerns. We are pleased to respond to your questions and work collaboratively toward our shared goal of making Rhodes the very best community it can be.

We truly appreciate the opportunity to meet in person with several students on December 2. We want to acknowledge the confusion and hurt that some of our students are currently feeling, whether that stems from the many leadership transitions in the past few years in both the president's office and Division of Student Life, the lingering impacts of the COVID pandemic, the loss of a beloved friend, or another experience while at Rhodes. As of July 1, we have new leadership in the presidency, in enrollment management, and in communications, and we will soon be announcing a new vice president of student life. We want to assure our students that all members of the Rhodes leadership team are committed to student success and wellbeing, and we are discussing several of the good ideas students suggested to us on Friday about how we can foster even more communication and transparency.

All members of the administration value open and constructive dialogue with members of our community and have ongoing opportunities available to encourage candid conversations. President Collins started at Rhodes on July 1 and immediately set out to get to know members of the Rhodes community. As part of her listening and learning, she has been meeting with student organization leaders and plans to continue to do so. Outside of these student organization meetings, President Collins has weekly office hours and lunches for students to share their concerns and ideas. Another opportunity for dialogue exists with our Student Life division. Interim Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students Alicia Golston and the Student Life team support and regularly attend student meetings, including RSG. They encourage students to make appointments with Student Life to discuss a particular need or issue they may be having, and students can use studentlife@rhodes.edu to request a meeting.

We also want to emphasize some of the core values that make Rhodes such a special community. We want our students to be passionate about learning, compassionate with others, and effective leaders who engage in a civil exchange of ideas and an appreciation of diverse perspectives. As we all affirm in our Standards of Conduct, we treat all members of the Rhodes community with conscientious respect, honor, kindness, and even-handedness. Accordingly, we do not name call and we do not make threats, but we instead assume every member of our community is operating with the very best of intentions and approach difficult conversations and shared challenges with grace, a collaborative and can-do spirit, and mutual respect. We know you share these values precisely because you chose Rhodes to be your college home, and we look forward to working together in a positive and constructive way to address any challenges we may face now or in the future.

We would like to share with you and other members of the Rhodes community our responses to the concerns you have raised, and in the interests of full transparency have tried to be as comprehensive as possible.

1.) Removal of mold from residence halls during the winter break; regular cleanings throughout the semester as well as the installation of fans in the residence hall bathrooms to ensure better Ventilation and reduce excess moisture.

We are actively developing a plan to confront needed renovations in a number of our older residence halls. We recognize the need to modernize bathrooms and common spaces in these halls. Determining a funding mechanism to accomplish this multi-million dollar project and establishing a plan to address the logistical challenges created (because at least two of the residence halls will probably have to come offline for a full year each) are some of our highest priorities. While we work on this longer-range planning, we are eager to work with students to address their concerns about cleanliness issues.

Students who are concerned about the possibility of mold in their rooms should submit a work order at this link: [Submit a Workorder to Physical Plant - Self-Service Portal \(topdesk.net\)](#) no later than December 9 and we will review and address these requests before students return in January. We also realize that students may not always be clear about what action has been taken in response to a work order. When we close out a work order ticket, we pledge to provide a description of our findings and any steps taken to resolve the issue to the student who submitted a work order. Students are encouraged to follow up if additional clarification is needed after the ticket is closed.

We have received 39 work orders this semester related to possible mold concerns, and Physical Plant responded to each work order. The majority of our inspections found no mold, but instead an accumulation of dust and dirt. The work orders where mold was found was surface mold that was easily cleaned by wiping it with a disinfectant. No toxic, embedded mold has been located in any residence hall to date. We have also confirmed that work orders regarding mold were checked and closed within 24 hours of receipt, with most completed the same day. An air quality test for mold was conducted by an environmental consultant in a first floor Glassell suite in October. The air test report indicated indoor mold levels in the normal range.

Regular cleaning of bathrooms and residence hall rooms is the best means of preventing and removing surface mold. We also continue to urge students to submit work orders if there are any areas of concern.

While we work on planning for more extensive renovations, the following work has already been or will be completed: we removed the carpet in the corridors of Williford in the summer of 2022 and replaced it with vinyl tile to reduce moisture buildup in those spaces; Housekeeping has started deep cleaning all public spaces in Williford and Glassell and will complete this work over the winter break; air filters in all residence halls will be changed beginning over the break period with completion in January; and bathroom exhaust fans will be installed in the summer of 2023 in the Voorhies suite bathrooms.

2.) Better quality control over food in the dining halls and more options for students with dietary restrictions. This includes more staff training in the Refectory and Lair, better labeling of ingredients and more kosher and halal options.

Our food service partner, Bon Appétit, team members truly want to hear from students directly and have met with a number of students this semester. Additionally, RSG has reconstituted its Student Dining Committee which meets with BA management on a recurring basis.

The management team has an open-door policy and dining team members are always happy to talk with students to address concerns or answer questions. Students are also encouraged to use Zingle to ask questions or offer real-time feedback from their phones (text 901-446-2822 or scan the QR code on table tents in the Refectory to access Zingle) or leave a comment at <https://rhodes.cafebonappetit.com/connect>. Additionally, students can contact our interim General Manager, Paul Taylor, at Paul.taylor@cafebonappetit.com or call at 216-905-9960. Communicating directly with the Bon Appétit team when something is wrong with your meal is important so the situation can be remedied in real-time, if possible.

The College and the Bon Appétit dining team have heard students' concerns about quality control and variety in the dining halls. The following actions are being taken to address these concerns:

Training: Our dining locations on campus have several new employees who are taking intensive on-the-job food safety and quality assurance training. Many students have seen this training in action and have commented on it. An additional culinary, hospitality, and food safety/quality assurance staff training will be conducted over winter break.

Food safety is Bon Appétit's top priority. The Shelby County Health Department conducted a surprise inspection of all Bon Appétit locations on our campus on November 4, 2022, and Rhodes received a score of 97 at the Lair and 96 at The Refectory. These scores and the detailed reports are publicly available here:

- Refectory - [My Health Department - TN Dept. of Health](#)
- Lynx Lair - [My Health Department - TN Dept. of Health](#)

Options for students with dietary restrictions: Registered Dietitian Jessica Perry visits campus regularly and is available to meet with students regarding their specific dietary needs. To make an appointment or ask a question at any time, email her at Jessica.perry@cafebonappetit.com. Jessica will be reviewing menus for all Rhodes College dining facilities weekly. Descriptive naming and Circle of Responsibility (COR) icons are used to identify the Top 9 allergens and menu items with specific dietary attributes, such as vegan and made without gluten-containing ingredients (MWG-CI). Menu icons and descriptions are listed [here](#). Full nutrition information for static items is available at <https://rhodes.cafebonappetit.com/>, and students are encouraged to speak with a chef, manager, or Jessica about ingredient questions. Students are also encouraged to use Zingle to ask questions or offer real-time feedback from their phones (text 901-446-2822 or scan the QR code on table tents in the Refectory to access Zingle) or leave a comment at <https://rhodes.cafebonappetit.com/connect>. For students avoiding gluten, the Refectory has a cooler with bread and baked goods that are made without gluten-containing ingredients, plus many items throughout the café are labeled MWG-CI. In addition, MWG-CI pizza, pasta, and sandwiches are available on request. Bon Appétit and the College will review potential kosher and halal program elements to address concerns about whether we have sufficient options available.

3.) The creation of a food pantry for emergency situations and for food-insecure students.

Planning for a food pantry is already underway and began earlier this semester. We have been looking at best practices at other colleges and determining what the most pressing needs are. Our goal is to have this go live sometime in the spring semester.

We have also been hard at work this semester exploring other ways to support our students. For example, students may face challenges purchasing appropriate attire when interviewing for internships and jobs. For this reason, Rhodes launched the [Career Closet](#) this year so students will have access to professional clothing for internships and interviews. We also launched two Compassionate Care funds earlier this semester, one to support students and one to support faculty and staff, who are facing various emergencies. These funds are already being utilized by students and are discussed in greater detail below.

4.) Reimbursements for students who have spent their own money to offset poor living conditions (i.e., dehumidifiers, air purifiers, health center fees, emergency room bills, etc.)

As we notified the campus community earlier this semester, Rhodes now has the Mel Richey Compassionate Care Fund where students can apply for funding if they are experiencing an emergency and have financial need at this link: <https://stuinfo.rhodes.edu/register/compassionatecareform>.

Funding applications are reviewed regularly, and we have already made some disbursements. Other emergency aid funds are potentially available, and students should contact the Office of Financial Aid for more information.

5.) Respect and accountability for priority housing for students with accommodations.

Approximately 187 students receive accommodated housing, and we have always worked hard to accommodate their varying needs. We are also engaged in a process of continuous improvement regarding our procedures for housing selection and accommodations. A Campus Housing Task Force began meeting last year and is continuing its work. It will make recommendations about how we can improve our procedures. Students, faculty, and staff are members of this group. The administration will review their recommendations and work collaboratively to streamline and improve this important process. We urge members of the student body to reach out to members of the task force at any time to share ideas and suggestions.

6.) More counseling services that are equipped to sustain the diversity of the student body such as counselors that can directly relate to students' experiences and that have expertise in trauma-informed care, and potentially more licensed therapists.

We completely agree that trauma-informed care is critical when counselors address the mental health needs of our students. All Rhodes counselors are already trained in and have expertise in this area.

We also agree it is important for students to have access to counselors who represent diverse identities and experiences. At the Student Counseling Center, there are five licensed clinical staff and between five and seven counseling interns. The current counseling team has diversity across identities, including but not limited to race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and practice background. You can find more information about our counseling team and our interns at these links: <https://sites.rhodes.edu/counselingcenter/meet-our-counselors-and-staff> and <https://sites.rhodes.edu/counselingcenter/training-opportunities>

In addition to our on-campus counseling staff, students have access to a network of off-campus therapists in the community, both in-person and via teletherapy, that students can connect with using our 24/7 support line (833-434-1217). Through this network, students can receive up to six sessions of counseling at no cost to them and with no use of insurance. Students can select counselors they want to work with based on factors such as identity and/or areas of specialization. Within ten miles of campus, there are approximately 40 counselors within our local network that specialize in cultural and ethnic issues.

The Student Counseling Center strives to ensure that all our counselors are operating from a trauma-informed lens. This approach to working with students begins with the recognition that often mental health challenges are the result of what a person has experienced and not something that is wrong with them. Counselors at the Student Counseling Center focus on fostering a safe, respectful, and collaborative relationship with students as they work toward meeting goals for improvement. As a Center that provides primarily short-term counseling, there may be times when a student has a complex trauma history that may take multiple years to be worked through. In these instances, it often makes sense to explore off-campus options for longer-term or specialized care.

The Student Counseling Center team is eager to learn from students about experiences with their team that may have fallen short of expectations so they can improve. Students who want to provide feedback can send it to counseling@rhodes.edu or they can call 901-843-3128 to set up a time to meet with Student Counseling Center leadership to discuss their experiences or concerns.

7.) More training for faculty regarding accessibility needs so that they are trauma-informed and can support students of different backgrounds.

Rhodes is committed to providing faculty with the necessary resources and training so they can anticipate and respond to the needs of our students. To that end, we have already conducted two faculty training sessions on accessibility needs this semester (detailed below), and more opportunities for faculty training and discussion on these important issues will be offered in spring 2023.

- On November 16th, the Office of Academic Affairs invited the Dean of Student Success and the Director of Accessibility Services to a meeting of all department and program chairs. They addressed student success, accessibility, accommodations, and mental health.
- On November 17th, the Office of Faculty Development held a Faculty Lair (workshop and discussion group) on accessibility to which all faculty were invited.

In addition, the Advisory Group for Accessibility, Disability, and Universal Design was established in 2022 to develop resources and raise awareness regarding the learning environment, digital environment, physical environment, and campus climate at Rhodes. This group will assist in providing resources and training to faculty and staff.

8.) The implementation of an emergency failsafe that grants universal fob access, for example, during active shooter situations, so that students do not have to run across campus to get to safety. This would also entail further discussions regarding the restoration of universal fob access for students.

Rhodes does not have the technology to instantly change user access to all the residence halls in the event of an emergency. It is a manual process for each individual building. Universal fob access is something the College is actively evaluating and discussing in the Campus Safety Task Force meetings. Colleges and universities are divided on this issue, as are our students. While universal access might be helpful in an emergency, not all students are comfortable with the entire student body, including students living off campus and graduate students, having unlimited access to all residence halls. If a fob were to be stolen, this could also give an intruder quick and easy access to a wide array of spaces. Our academic buildings are open from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, and we are considering extending those hours.

9.) Overhaul of Campus Safety policies to be more transparent and student-driven with a focus on creating relationships between students and officers.

As we have shared with the campus community, this work is well underway. We constituted a Campus Safety Task Force in October, which has been charged "to evaluate campus safety efforts to ensure they are transparent and free of bias, study what needs to be done in the areas of infrastructure, resources, and partnerships, and submit actionable recommendations for lasting change." In particular, the Campus Partnerships working group has been specifically tasked with addressing the following questions, among others:

- How can we foster closer relationships between our campus safety team and students, faculty, and staff?
- What steps can we take to ensure our campus safety efforts are free from any possible bias and fully transparent to our campus community? Should we consider an ongoing Safety Advisory Board, for example?
- What steps can we take to promote accountability? Should there be an annual community survey on campus safety, for example?

As part of the Task Force's work, a campus-wide survey will be distributed very soon to ensure every member of the campus community can weigh in on these issues. The survey will be followed up with focus groups at the beginning of the spring semester. You can follow the work of the Task Force at this link: [Campus Safety Task Force | Rhodes College](#), and all members of the Rhodes community should feel free to reach out to any member of the task force at any time to offer feedback, comments, or suggestions.

10.) A more accessible, interactive, and responsive website for the health center where students can easily make appointments.

We are actively exploring possibilities to enable students to make online appointments for the Health Center and identifying the appropriate staff training. We have already tasked staff members with making improvements to the Health Center website.

11.) Access to an Uber account and food/supplies for students staying on campus during breaks. Students' basic needs should not be neglected while they are on campus.

Students who stay on campus during the breaks have food service available to them through Bon Appetit, and students with financial need can ask for assistance in utilizing this service. For those wanting food service and food items from off campus, we recognize transportation can be a challenge. While MATA bus service is available at North Parkway and University, we are exploring whether to make a scheduled shuttle service available for students who remain on campus or provide Uber vouchers for students' use. There is a grocery trip planned for December 8 at 5:30 pm for students staying on campus during the break or for those who just need supplies. Students should meet at the Bailey Lane entrance for a trip to Superio and Target. We will likely poll the students who plan to remain on campus over the winter break and ask them what type of trips they would like to make and determine what would be the most helpful.

12.) Participatory budgeting to ensure accountability from the administration: Let us know how our money is spent. This will include the reallocation of funds to achieve the aforementioned demands.

We would be delighted to set up a forum for students to learn about the budgeting process and how funds are spent. Since it is so close to finals at this point, we will schedule something early in the spring semester so more students can attend. We also look forward to involving our students, through their elected RSG representatives, in helping us set priorities for our upcoming capital campaign.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions, and we look forward to constructive, collaborative, and collegial communication in the future. We urge you to take advantage of the serve in Rhodes Student Government work tirelessly on behalf of their fellow students, and we elected you to represent students who regular in the opportunities RSG provides for student engagement and feedback going forward.

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