

IDS

‘It’s really hard to say goodbye to someone like that’: Remembering Dan Plebanek

By Ally Melnik
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In front of the Circle K at the corner of Indiana Avenue and Third Street are flowers, pictures and a pumpkin, in honor of Daniel Plebanek’s favorite time of year.

“One thing that he really loved was fall and Halloween and horror movies,” said Elizabeth Clerkin, an IU doctoral candidate in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. “It’s really hard knowing that he didn’t get to have one more October.”

Clerkin was best friends with Dan, who passed away Wednesday after being hit by a pickup truck the previous day. He was 27 and a doctoral candidate in psy-

chology with Clerkin.

He was transported to IU Health Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis after the accident, where Clerkin said his mom told her he suffered several hematomas in his brain and was on a ventilator.

“I know he had multiple surgeries, and the doctors really, really worked hard, but there was just nothing that they could do at some point,” Clerkin said.

Bonnie Plebanek, Dan’s mom, said in an email he passed away around 8:30 p.m. Wednesday night.

“There are no words to describe how we are all feeling or how we are all reacting,” she said.

Dan was born on June 1, 1993, and raised in Homer Glen, Illi-

nois. He graduated in 2015 from the University of Iowa with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and linguistics, in 2017 from Ohio State with a master’s in psychology, then came to IU to pursue a doctorate.

Clerkin met Dan in 2015 while interviewing for different graduate school programs. Despite being at three of the same interviews, Clerkin spent her undergraduate, graduate and doctorate careers in Bloomington and only saw Dan occasionally.

“So for a while we were long-distance friends,” Clerkin said. “Talking every day and only getting to see each other at conferences where we would meet up and kind of sneak away from all the work

events to go just hang out.”

When Dan got to IU in 2017, professor Karin James said in an email she began to work with him when he began his graduate work in her lab. She described him as a dedicated student and scientist.

“He had a gift for asking the important questions in his research and designing experiments that were complex and meaningful,” James said.

Dan was studying general category learning and the development of understanding categories in young children, James said. He was set to graduate this upcoming May and has been awarded a posthumous doctorate



COURTESY PHOTO
The late Dan Plebanek smiles for a selfie with Elizabeth Clerkin.

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New cases decline in new update

By Matt Cohen
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For a fourth straight week, IU reports a decrease in new cases as well as COVID-19 mitigation and symptomatic positivity rates.

This Wednesday’s dashboard update covers testing conducted over the week of Sept. 27 through Oct. 3. The school continues to report it is not seeing any indications for COVID-19 spread in classrooms. Dr. Aaron Carroll, IU’s director of mitigation testing, said that is a main reason why IU has never had a shut down similar to what other in-state schools like Butler University and University of Notre Dame have had.

IU-Bloomington had a 1.08% mitigation testing positivity rate last week. That is down from 1.44% the week prior. That brought the overall positivity rate in Bloomington to 3.3%. Across all campuses, IU had a mitigation testing positivity rate of below 1% in a given week for the first time.

There were 103 new cases reported in Bloomington over the last week. That brings the total number of positive tests found by mitigation testing to 1,823. That is the smallest increase in total positive tests IU has had in a single week.

Broken down by groups, live-in greek students had a 1.6% positivity rate last week out of 773 tests. Off-campus greek affiliated students had a 3.4% positivity rate out of 235 tests. Dorm residents had a 1.2% positivity rate out of 6,297 tests. All other off-campus students had a 0.5% positivity rate out of 1,846 tests.

All of those rates are decreased compared to the week prior.

Symptomatic testing declined as well, with a 16.45% positivity rate last week. That’s down from just over 19% the week prior. This is a fourth straight week of decline in symptomatic testing positivity rates and total positive tests. There have been 739 recorded positives in Bloomington from symptomatic testing and a 35.4% positivity rate since Aug. 1.

The dashboard reports since Aug. 24, IU has tested 4,968 faculty and staff with only 11 total positives across all campuses. Faculty and staff had no positive results over the last week.

The COVID-19 prevalence rate for all of IU is 0.4% and in Bloomington is 0.7%.

Isolation and quarantine facility utilization was roughly cut in half to 7.6%, down from 14% the week prior in Bloomington. Those facilities refer to the Ashton dorm which houses only on-campus residents — but not greek live-in students — who are either sick with COVID-19 or quarantined there as a close contact of someone who did test positive.

While IU’s new cases and positivity rates declined, IU-Bloomington also administered fewer total tests for a third straight week. IU’s lowest total week of testing was the week of Sept. 6, during which there were fewer than 8,000 tests. That came the week after IU’s highest week of positivity rates.

The total number of tests went back above 10,000 the next week, the week of Sept. 13. However, that total has declined every week since.

As of last week’s dashboard update, IU continues to plan for its on-campus labs to open by mid-October. When those labs open, IU plans to have around 15,000 tests per day and every student tested at least one-to-two times per week. However, IU still has not given an official date of when those labs will

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This election could be chaotic.

How might that play out in Bloomington?

By Kaitlyn Radde
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This election season is marked by uncertainty, with concerns about delayed results and unrest due to COVID-19. We spoke with election officials and community members to address the questions and concerns that have been raised throughout the campaign and at last week’s presidential debate.

Overall, Monroe County election officials are optimistic about the election going smoothly. They urge voters to vote early and in person and to send any mail-in ballots as soon as possible.

However, it is important to remain vigilant and informed about what can be done to address potential threats to a free and fair election, both in Monroe County and nationwide.

Here’s what you need to know.

Are there concerns about voter intimidation?

At last week’s presidential debate, President Don-

ald Trump encouraged his supporters to monitor the polls, an appeal that many nonpartisan election experts saw as a call to voter intimidation. The call has already been met by some supporters in Philadelphia and could occur in other parts of the country.

Karen Wheeler, the Monroe County election supervisor, said poll watchers must have credentials, which come from her office. Nicole Browne, the Monroe County clerk and a member of the election board, further explained poll watchers are not licensed to intimidate or interfere with voters in any way.

“You can’t just walk into a polling site and announce yourself as a poll watcher and think that we are going to allow you to stay,” Browne said. “That would not happen at any time, but especially at this time when people want to know that the people who are in there are supposed to be there.”

Hal Turner, the chair of the Monroe County Elec-

tion Board, explained the “chute,” which is the area within 50 feet of a polling place. Legally, no partisan activity, from non-credentialed poll watching to demonstrations, is allowed inside the chute. Anyone who attempts to do so will be asked to leave.

Law enforcement would intervene as needed, but election officials do not foresee law enforcement intervention being necessary if individuals are asked to leave.

RG Reynolds, a researcher at No Space For Hate, a group fighting white supremacy in Bloomington and the surrounding area, said people tend to think about voter intimidation narrowly.

Voter intimidation is more than directly threatening voters through violence or deception — intimidation of and violence against

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION
BY ANNIE AGUIAR

IU releases 2020-21 fiscal year budget

By Vivek Rao and Carson TerBush
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IU-Bloomington’s total budget for this academic year, publicly released three months later than usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is \$1.7 billion, 0.1% smaller than last year’s.

IU President Michael McRobbie mandated general funds — the largest funding group for most academic departments, programs and other various expenses — be cut back 5% for all campuses.

While the university’s total budget decreased 0.9%, the amount dedicated to the university’s general fund across all campuses fell 1.9% to \$2.12 billion, and the IU-B general fund fell only 1.5% to \$16.8 million. As a response to the pandemic, the university froze hiring and salary increases in April.

Sam Adams, associate vice president for budget and planning, said this is because academic compensation is the university’s largest expense — in the new budget, it totals more than \$570 million, or approximately 27.1% of the general fund. Revenue from tuition and student fees fell 1% to \$1.44 billion. While not finalized, revenue from all sources is forecasted to fall \$40 million.

The largest relative change in Bloomington’s general fund came from the Vice President’s Office for Diversity, Equity and Multicultural Affairs. The Bloomington section of the department saw a 25% decrease in the amount of funding it received from the general fund.

The office includes IU-Bloomington’s culture centers, the Hudson & Holland Scholars Program and the Groups Scholars program. However, a separate DEMA account listed under university administration saw an increase in funding.

James Wimbush, Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Multicultural Affairs, said the transfer from the Bloomington budget account to the overall university account was intentional.

“This process aligns with the mission of OVPDEMA and makes clear that, as a university-wide or-

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Couple keeps their B&B alive despite COVID-19

By Wei Wang
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From March 17 to Aug. 1, the Wampler House Boutique Hotel Bed & Breakfast Inn was completely closed for business. This meant zero revenue for owners Zack and Donna Malham who rely on the business as their sole source of income.

“Without heads in beds, we’re dead in the water,” Zack said in June.

The couple’s application for the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Economic Injury Disaster Loan was finally approved Sept. 4, four and a half months after they first applied. It was their second time applying for the loan. They received more than half of what they applied for, Zack said.

“We never gave up, and I can’t tell you how many people we know, honestly, that did give up,” he said.

Just two days later, one of the bed-and-breakfast’s main air

conditioning units broke down. The couple paid \$3,500 to fix it, but they wouldn’t have had the money to pay for it without the loan, Zack said.

“I told Donna — I said, is that provisional or what?” he said.

In late April, the couple first applied for the federal Economic Injury Disaster Loan, which offered 30-year low-interest loans for small businesses and nonprofit organizations. Their application was rejected, and they were put at the end of the line after millions of applications from around the U.S. when they applied again.

“If you don’t continue to advocate for yourself — we did not give up, and it was four months, four aggravating months,” Zack said. “This whole time, I had the patience of Job.”

Todd Saxton, associate professor at IU-Purdue University Indianapolis’ Kelley School of Business, said on both the individual and organizational levels, those more well-off and on the higher



ALEX DERYN | **IDS**
The Wampler House Boutique House Bed & Breakfast Inn is located at 4905 S. Rogers St. The bed and breakfast has struggled with finances due to the coronavirus pandemic.

end of the socioeconomic spectrum have fared well in the U.S. during the pandemic, while the underprivileged and the smaller businesses have even less.

“And hospitality is one of those industries where the suffering has been wide and deep, from large to small companies,” he said. “Travel businesses have even less.

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degree by IU and the College of Arts and Sciences.

In addition to his academic work, Dan helped mentor undergraduate students, worked as a teaching assistant for James and helped design

the course she's currently teaching, she said.

"We did research together, taught together and mentored together," James said. "He was my partner in work. My right arm."

Since his passing, a GoFundMe has been set up by one of Dan's family members

to raise money for a memorial bench outside the psychology building, Bonnie said. Within an hour, their goal was reached and people continued to donate.

The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences decided to create the Daniel J. Plebanek Memorial Research

Fellowship, where one graduate student in the department will be funded for their research work during the summer.

As of Tuesday, more than \$23,000 has been raised through the GoFundMe. If \$25,000 is raised, the fellowship can go on in perpetuity,

Bonnie said.

"We are of course overwhelmed by the outpouring of support and donations that this fund has acquired but hope that it can somehow reach more people and continue to grow," she said.

Clerkin said although Dan typically didn't like attention,

the memorial and fellowship will allow him to get the recognition he deserves.

"He worked really, really hard here," Clerkin said. "He definitely deserves to be honored on the campus. And it's really hard to say goodbye to someone like that."

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open and when that increased testing will actually begin.

As greek house quarantines end and many live-in residents move out of the homes, the total number of greek students tested continues to decline as the highest rate. Through the first few weeks of classes, that was the group where IU heavily weighted testing. This past week, 1,008 total tests were given to greek students including those both living in the house and those living out. That is the fewest number of tests in a given week to greek life affiliated students.

Among greek houses, there were over 800 positive cases, and all of those students will not be selected for mitigation testing for 90 days after their positive result, according to IU's policy.

IU did not provide a reason for the small decline in total tests.

As of Oct. 7, only six greek houses remain in quarantine. Two of those are Alpha Epsilon Pi — which was ordered to close and given a cease and desist order — and Sigma Phi Epsilon which was also given a cease and desist order.

As greek house positivity rates continue to decline, that large focus of testing has shifted to the dorms.

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ganization, we serve all IU campuses," he said.

According to IU Spokesperson Chuck Carney, the overall OVPDEMA budget was reduced 1.5%, around \$120,000, due to COVID-19 budget cuts.

The university also directed an additional \$4.5 million toward student financial aid, allocating \$397 million in total.

This includes funding from endowments such as those managed by the IU Foundation.

Since the budget was released three months after the start of this fiscal year, IU started spending money for this academic year before its financial plan was finalized. Adams said the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to predict how much money IU would receive from tuition and state appropriations.

"We were in the new fiscal year before we actually had an approved budget because we needed more time with the uncertainties around COVID to build that budget," Adams said.

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Black Lives Matter protesters over the summer is also voter intimidation, Reynolds said.

"It shows the broader American public that white people can exercise the power over life and death with impunity," she said. "This Jim Crow-style terror tactic was originally designed to show marginalized people the consequences of speaking up and speaking out."

She also expressed concerns that on-campus events related to voting and the election could be disrupted by white supremacist or other far-right groups.

To report voter intimidation, accessibility issues or fraud, you can contact state officials here and county officials here. You can also contact the nonpartisan Election Protection hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE.

Should we be worried about white supremacist interference?

At the debate, Trump also declined to denounce white supremacy, instead telling the Proud Boys, a white supremacist group, to "stand back and stand by." Two days later, he issued a statement condemning white supremacists, but the Proud Boys gained hundreds of members in the 24 hours after the debate.

Reynolds said many white nationalist and white supremacist groups beyond the Proud Boys have become more active as a direct result of Trump's comment. She said a civil conflict has been brewing since about 2017, and over the next two or three months, there may be more examples of lone-wolf terrorist activity.

"People are waiting for a warning shot or a first major skirmish," she said. "We like to think of wars in terms of story, in terms of concrete moments where the battles begin and the war is won. And it's not really so neat or tidy."

In Bloomington specifically, she said we are more likely to see an intensification of what has already been happening. That includes far-right and pro-Trump demonstrations featuring white supremacist imagery, heavily armed individuals and physical violence.

According to a No Space for Hate report, Bloomington is a strategic recruiting hub for white supremacist groups. Events like the Aug. 22, pro-police Red, White and Blue

Rally are a major draw for far-right and white nationalist organizers from around Indiana, and they bring violence with them. There were also multiple incidents of sexual harassment and two vehicular attacks against Black Lives Matter protesters in Bloomington this summer.

Reynolds said to be vigilant and to immediately report any white supremacist flyers or flyers that spread misinformation about voting to the voter intimidation hotline. For those who will vote in person, she said to go early and leave immediately.

Are there concerns about fraud?

There are many precautions in place to ensure the election is free and fair in Monroe County.

"Every time a ballot is touched, there has to be a Republican and a Democrat there," Turner said. The county is still looking for poll workers of both political parties for this reason.

In terms of ballot security, Turner said both in-person and mail-in ballots are put in a locked area with video surveillance, motion detectors and cipher locks. There is one cipher lock for each party, and the two have to be activated within 20 seconds of each other for anyone to have access to the ballots.

"There will always be a member of each major party observing what happens to those ballots," Turner said.

What if there are delays declaring winners?

Browne and Wheeler both encouraged all registered voters to vote early and to send mail-in ballots back as early as possible.

"That will help us tremendously as we work to deliver you those accurate election results," Browne said.

Wheeler said in-person voting, both early and on Election Day, is safe. It is easier than voting by mail, she said.

At last week's debate, moderator Chris Wallace asked the candidates if they would encourage their supporters to remain calm as they waited for votes to be counted. Trump declined to do so, leading some Americans to brace for unrest and violence. Browne acknowledged this was a concern and asked Monroe County voters to be patient.

"Accuracy is more important than speed," she said. "I hope that's true across the nation, but unfortunately I can only be responsible for



ETHAN LEVY | IDS
Voters wait in line to vote Tuesday at a polling location at 401 W. 7th St. Tuesday was the first day of early voting in Indiana.

Monroe County."

Due to a ruling that Indiana must count all ballots postmarked by Election Day, Wheeler said in case of mail delays, there will be a 10-day waiting period to allow for all mail-in ballots postmarked in time to arrive and be counted, even if they arrive after Election Day. However, if that ruling is appealed and overturned, she expects Monroe County to have results on election night. Delays in national results are likely.

What if Trump won't respect the election results?

At the debate, Trump suggested the only way he would lose was by fraud. At a press conference the week before the debate, he declined to commit to a peaceful transition of power. This has left many to wonder what will happen if he tries to declare himself winner before all the votes are counted or if he tries to remain in office in spite of a loss. Some observers are preparing for the possibility of a coup.

Constitutional lawyers agree that once an election winner is certified, the winner will be installed, but all candidates do have the right to contest election results in the courts. Doing so in every state would be a massive undertaking that would require months of work in advance. If no winner was clear by Inauguration Day, the next person in the line of succession — Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi — would assume the presidency. Even this clear, legal line of succession could be cast into doubt, however. Some legal scholars have argued the Constitution requires only executive branch

officials to be included in the line of succession.

This could create competing claims between Pelosi and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the next member of the executive branch in the line of succession. A similar situation could play out if Trump dies or is incapacitated while the election results are still pending, a concern that has grown more acute since he contracted COVID-19.

Many organizations, namely the Transition Integrity Project, have tried to predict various scenarios to prepare for. The outcomes largely depend on the extent to which the military, other Republican elected officials and the Republican electorate are willing to go along with what Trump does. Democrats have been focused on winning by overwhelming margins so he has no plausible argument upon which to contest the election.

How is COVID-19 affecting the election?

Wheeler said election officials have picked polling sites that are larger, around 4,000 square feet, to allow for social distancing. In the past, Monroe County has had 34 polling sites. For this election, there are 28 — but that is a large increase from the primary, when only seven polling locations were open. There are fewer polling sites open because officials chose to not use smaller locations that would make social distancing more challenging, such as fire stations.

Browne said the board has mailed out about 12,000 ballot requests, about half the number that were sent out in the primary.

Browne said ensuring safety during the pandemic is at the top of the election board's priorities. Polling places will have additional safety practices in place, including social distancing and providing hand sanitizer. Voters are encouraged to wear masks. Writing utensils, and anything else voters touch, will be sanitized between uses. She also said Monroe County had a better-than-expected response to a call for poll workers, which the county put out to allow older or other vulnerable poll workers to take this election off.

"Every single day, including today, I come into at least a dozen requests for information about working the polls," she said. "I have no reason to believe we won't be adequately staffed at all of our polling sites."

But Turner said the county is still looking for more poll workers from both parties.

"We always need more than enough, because people drop out, people get sick," he said. If you would like to be a poll worker, you can find who to contact here.

Beyond coronavirus safety at the polling places, Trump testing positive for the coronavirus is throwing more uncertainty on an already chaotic election cycle. His diagnosis led white supremacists on Twitter to increase their anti-Chinese sentiment, Reynolds said.

"I think the biggest issue with this is how the virus with actually be used if people recover. Because it's more than just Trump," she said, referring to the other high-level Republicans that tested positive. "It's really thrown a lot of gasoline on the fire."

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el and tourism are still under water."

Zack said this was not the first time that the couple has had to deal with challenges in their adventurous life.

Exactly five years ago on Sept. 29, the couple packed up their belongings, waved goodbye to their 40-year stay in Colorado and drove back to Bloomington to pursue their dream of running their own B&B in the city where they first met, dated and got married. For 90 days, they had to stay at Donna's mother's house while waiting for their deal for Wampler House, which

is located at 4905 S. Rogers St., to come through.

Since reopening at 50% capacity Aug. 1, Zack said the rooms available are almost always booked or occupied. There have been more weekday guests staying longer periods than before. He said they have been even busier than before the COVID-19 pandemic, and this is exactly what they signed up for.

Andrew Butters, assistant professor at the IU Kelley School of Business, said although occupancy rates and revenue per room have both sunk in the hospitality industry, small and mid-scale segments like B&Bs have not decreased as much

as luxury or large-scale hotels.

Consumers prefer shorter trips within driving distance because of concerns about plane travel during the pandemic, he said.

Zack said after half a year since shutting their doors mid-March, he feels humbled and thankful good things came their way. But without their hard work, they wouldn't be where they are now.

"I know that the universe is aligned, and I know it works, but it only works for those who want to work with it," he said.

Three and a half months ago, the Malhams were uncertain about reopening,

let alone seeing customers flock in.

"If COVID has different plans, then so be it," Zack said in June. "But at least we're fighting to stay afloat."

There was no revenue for the couple for four and a half months since they shut down mid-March. Although they were allowed to reopen on May 15, as many other local B&Bs did, the couple decided to stay closed. It would be like rolling out the red carpet for COVID-19 if they let customers in too soon, Zack said.

During that time, the couple lived on social security and paid their housekeeper, their only employee, through the federal Payment

Protection Program.

But to keep their B&B business, they had to keep paying out of their own pockets for insurances, utilities and maintenance fees.

"The place drinks money like it's lemonade," Zack said. "It costs a lot to run it because of the effort we put into it to make it a top-drawer operation."

The Malhams sought a variety of local, state and federal grants and loans to keep their business alive. Over the summer, they received \$8,900 from the Monroe County Food & Beverage COVID-19 Virus Relief grant, but Zack said it was only enough to help them make it through to July.

But now the couple's hardest time has come to a close. On Sept. 25, the couple's loan forbearance application was also approved. Exactly four days later was the five-year anniversary since the couple moved from Colorado back to Bloomington, where their story began.

On Zack and Donna's calendar, the quote for September 2020 is from Alexander the Great. When Zack flipped the calendar page on Sept. 1, he had no idea that three days later his loan application would be approved.

The quote read, "There is nothing impossible to him who will try."

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