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The Zoellner Arts Center has signs throughout the facility that put an emphasis on keeping students safe from COVID-19. In August, Zoellner announced that events will only be held online for the fall. (Annalise Kelloff/B&W Staff)

Zoellner Arts Center prepares for virtual semester

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BY ELLA MORRISSEY — ; PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 1, 2020, 3:50 PM ; **UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2, 2020, 10:21 PM** CORONAVIRUS, LIFESTYLE

Zoellner Arts Center announced on Aug. 14 that there would be no in-person events this fall due to COVID-19.

Some Lehigh students are having to adjust to what that means for their majors or extracurricular experiences.

Candi Staurinos, the director of advertising for Zoellner Arts Center, said in an email that Zoellner has worked hard to develop plans to ensure that events will still happen. She said performances will be live streamed or recorded.

Staurinos said Zoellner is developing procedures to safely accommodate classes, rehearsals, visitors and performers while they attempt to continue virtual programming.

Shaun McNulty, '22, a double major in international relations and theatre, has been in multiple shows at Zoellner and is gearing up for a different kind of semester.

He said Zoellner has plans in place for many online events that will hopefully attract all students.

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"It is kind of heartbreaking that we can't do in-person shows but I completely understand why," McNulty said. "We have much bigger issues to worry about."

Eva Ehrich, '22, who has been a part of shows in past years including "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Spring Awakening," understands the challenges that come along with virtual events, but also sees many possibilities for this year.

"I think (the Department of Theatre) has the opportunity to engage people more depending on what kinds of things they are doing," Ehrich said. "They can partner with different departments and can do things I think that they wouldn't normally have time or the interest to do that are going to bring in students that aren't just theater students."

The Campus Event Advisory Group is a committee that reviews requests for large gatherings that a campus group may want to have. If any event is approved, Zoellner is always a venue option.

"We hope to be a resource to the campus for all-student events either outdoors in the tent beside Zoellner, indoors later in the semester, if it is deemed safe, or to stream student-run events like Diwali or Fusion to the rest of the campus," Staurinos said.

When Zoellner is able to safely open back up again, students are looking forward to the performances ahead.

"I'm most excited for just being able to see people perform and put their hearts out because we have so many student designers who work their butts off months in advance, before the cast lists even come out," McNulty said. "They put their heart and soul into what we see on stage and I'm so excited to see that again."