Rutgers College During WWI and the 1918 Influenza

Rutgers and World War I: Enrollment and the Student Army Training Corps (SATC)

Photograph of the Raising of Service Flag. ca. 1918. Rutgers Photograph Collection, Military Functions, R.O.T.C. Folder. Special Collections & University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.
In the fall of 1918, the War Department’s Student Army Training Corps (SATC) required the usage of Rutgers College fraternity houses for barrack-style housing and offices.

The War Service Bureau of Rutgers College

Opening paragraph of the War Service Bureau’s first letter after peace was declared, November 1918.

Source: Special Collections & University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.
The Influenza of 1918

A.k.a “Spanish Flu,” “the grippe,” “Spanish Influe,” the bug”

- Possibly started in Haskell County, Kansas.
  - Hog farming community + bird migratory pathway = influenza
- Infected Haskell County men → Kansas training camps → other US camps → Europe
  - Not just contained to areas affected by war
- Spain was a neutral country and freely reported on the influenza spread = “Spanish Flu”
  - Media in other countries avoided reporting on the influenza as to not weaken morale
- One of the deadliest epidemics in history - killed as many as 1 in 18
Letter from Elmer G. Bracher to Earl Reed Silvers (‘Sil’). Written from a convalescent camp in France. Bracher expressed the bad luck one soldier experienced when contracting the ‘flu’ upon his return home from war.

France, December 3, 1918

Source: Records of the War Service Bureau. Special Collections & University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.
The 1918 Influenza and Rutgers College

- Most US colleges and universities affected in the fall of 1918
- Rutgers saw heaviest activities between September and November
- Demarest- 75 students affected, 4 total student deaths
- Students treated at the Ivy Club-turned-infirmary or New Brunswick hospitals

Cancellations and Closures

Source: “Women’s College Closed.”
The Targum. October 9, 1918.

Source: “Lafayette Game Cancelled.”
The Targum. October 9, 1918.
Notice published in the *Targum* advising students on how to avoid the influenza, October 16, 1918.

**Spanish Influenza.**

There is no cause for alarm over the fact that there are several cases of Spanish Influenza in the student body, for the percentage of cases is far below the percentage elsewhere. Most of the college cases are being taken care of either at the infirmary, or at the city hospitals, although a few have been sent home.

Any student who feels that he is developing any of the symptoms of influenza; namely, a fever, sneezing, a bad cold or cough, sore throat, pain in the chest, general weakness or chills, should report immediately to his company commander and obtain permission to see the college physician. A little care at this time will well repay you, otherwise you may be laid up for weeks, and possibly develop pneumonia.

There are certain precautions which every one should observe in order to avoid catching and spreading the disease. It is transmitted by coughing and sneezing. If you have to cough or sneeze, cover your mouth with your handkerchief. Avoid those who cough or sneeze persistently, and do not spend any more time than necessary in crowded rooms.

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**Symptoms**

- Fever
- Sneezing
- Bad cough or cold
- Sore throat
- Pain in the chest
- General weakness or chill

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**Precautions**

- Cover one’s mouth with a handkerchief when coughing or sneezing
- Do not spend any more time than necessary in crowded rooms
- Try to avoid exposure to colds, as a cold is often the first stage of the “flu”
I now must write a line or two,
As all good poets sometimes do.
Of all sickness, I am glad
“Influ” I have never had.
I never mind a chimney “flue,”
Or an army cot, just broke in two;
But of all the birds that ever fly,
This “flu” bird simply takes my eye.
So take a bath, and never doubt
The “flu” will get you,
If you don’t watch out.

Well, here’s where I get off.

LEW TENANT.


Bracher, Elmer G. Letter to Earl Reed Silvers. December 1918. Box 9, Folder 5, RG 33/C0/01 Records of the Rutgers College War Service Bureau. Special Collections & University Archives, Rutgers University Archives.


Records of the Rutgers College War Service Bureau. RG 33/C0/01. University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.
