

Maud S. Mandel

to WILLIAMS-ALL

Dear Williams community,

I'm writing to inform you that Williams plans to convene an in-person semester for fall 2020. Our plan includes extraordinary public health measures for everyone's protection, options for people who are unable to come to campus because of medical or other concerns, and a full curriculum of hybrid and remote courses. These measures will provide flexibility for all, as well as protections for international students and those from vulnerable populations, and for everyone residing on or working on campus.

I'm eager to welcome our community back. As beautiful as this campus is, Williams without people just isn't Williams. To do this responsibly will require significant adjustments to the ways we live and learn, and sharing the commitments and sacrifices needed to protect each other. When in doubt we're going to err on the side of caution, because what's at stake is the health and wellbeing of our extended community, to which we all have a collective responsibility.

The result of prioritizing health and safety is that the semester will be substantially different in many ways, which may feel restrictive to some. If you feel uncomfortable with the changes to the campus and academic program outlined in this letter, or prefer to wait for something more like a traditional semester—and there are many reasons why a person might want to do so—then you do have the option to take time off or remain off-campus and take your courses remotely.

Following is a high-level overview of our approach for this fall, which incorporates safety protocols from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [the Commonwealth of Massachusetts](#). You can visit our [Covid-19 website and FAQ](#) for details and can read [a summary](#) of the report from the [Working Group on Returning for Fall 2020](#), upon whose outstanding work our plan is based. Many departments, programs and offices have also posted information and FAQs on their own sites (these are linked to from the Covid site, as well).

Finally, starting tomorrow (Tuesday, June 30) we'll offer a series of town halls with college leaders and administrators from key areas, so that you can ask questions, learn more about the implications of our decision, and envision what fall semester might be like. Visit the [Town Halls and Important Dates page](#) of the Covid site for dates and times. You can also submit questions and comments anytime via the [Covid comment portal](#). Continuing after the July 4 holiday, we'll add information about virtual meetings and office hours around campus, too.

To get us started, here are the plan's major points:

ACADEMICS

Academics: A [list of fall courses](#) is starting today, including information about instructors and modes of instruction. I encourage you to review it. Faculty have been working hard to prepare for the fall—a challenging task, given the pandemic and the difficulty of developing “hybrid” courses that blend in-person and remote instruction. Thanks to their work, however, students who opt to study remotely will still have full access to our courses, although not necessarily all sections. Indeed, a significant percentage of courses will be entirely remote even for students on campus, so that we can manage class sizes, ensure social distancing and meet the needs of faculty and staff who must remain off-campus for their own safety. It’s possible that a student living on campus could even have all of their courses be remote, depending on their choices.

In light of this fact, it’s important to note that our online courses this fall will be substantially different than the ones students experienced in the spring, when the college had to make the transition to remote learning quickly, with little advance notice.

Academic calendar: The academic calendar for dates of instruction remains [as posted](#), with classes beginning on Thursday, September 10, and ending on Friday, December 11. We’ll offer a combination of in-person and remote instruction until Thanksgiving, after which all instruction will be held remotely, as will exams.

Students will be able to ask to remain on campus during and past Thanksgiving break, as long as they agree not to travel out of the area during their time of residence. This accommodation will be available to students for a variety of reasons related to concerns about travel or conditions at home. All other students will be expected to leave campus at Thanksgiving break and complete the rest of their semester from elsewhere.

As you know, we’ve canceled Winter Study for 2021 *only*. We’ll share the start date and calendar for spring semester sometime in October 2020.

Credits and requirements: As a reminder, for the 2020-21 academic year only, Williams has reduced the minimum number of required courses per semester from four to three. The faculty also lowered the number of credits required for graduation, so that you’ll only need to take three credits per semester this year in order to graduate on time. You can of course take more than the minimum number if you wish.

Also for the 2020-21 academic year only, students will be able to take as many pass-fail courses as they wish (provided the courses are designated as pass-fail eligible). Those courses *will not* count toward students’ allowance of three pass-fail courses during their time at Williams.

And students will be able to choose whether to withdraw from a course or designate a course as pass-fail up until the last day of classes.

Finally, for the 2020-2021 academic year, courses designated as pass-fail can be used to fulfill college requirements, including the divisional requirement, Writing Skills (W), Quantitative/Formal Reasoning (Q), and Difference, Power and Equity (DPE).

Pre-registration for fall semester will open on Monday, August 10. You'll receive advance instructions from the Registrar's Office in the coming weeks. Incoming first-year students and incoming transfer students will be matched with a faculty advisor, with that information to come in mid- to late July.

Requests to take time off: While we look forward to seeing many of you, we know others will choose to take time off. Incoming first year students and incoming transfer students may opt to take a *gap year*. Returning sophomores, juniors and seniors may opt to take a *personal leave*. All students will soon receive a letter from Dean of the College Marlene Sandstrom that provides instructions for making such requests. The deadline to declare your choice will be 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, July 10.

Study away: The majority of our study away partners have cancelled their on-site programming for the fall. This includes our own [Williams-Mystic Program](#). If you've applied to a program that's still operating an in-person study abroad program for the fall and would like to attend, please contact [Director of International Education and Study Away Tina Stoiciu](#) to determine whether or not Williams can authorize the program. If you're hoping to participate in the [Williams-Exeter Programme at Oxford](#) this fall, the college will contact you in early August to let you know whether a fall departure for Oxford is possible.

CAMPUS RETURN

Returning to campus: Students will be brought back to Williams in stages, several hundred at a time, beginning in late August, to allow for thorough Covid-19 testing. Information about dates will be sent to families later this summer. You'll only be allowed to return during your assigned dates, but will have options for requesting an alternative arrival in extenuating circumstances.

With limited exceptions, staff will *not* come back to campus immediately. Essential staff already know their on-campus schedules, and the relative few others who'll now also be expected to return will be informed directly by your managers. All other employees should continue with your current remote arrangements until further notice.

Faculty may access offices as always, but we ask you to please keep your campus visits to a strict minimum until COVID testing has begun, to wear masks, and to observe the state social distancing protocols.

First Days orientation: Incoming first-year students and incoming transfer students will be invited to participate in our First Days Orientation program. This program will be available for all enrolled students, whether they're on campus or participating remotely. First Days provides our newest members of the Williams student community with information about academics, residential life, co-curricular activities, health and wellness, identity and privilege, and much more. You'll learn more about First Days

shortly from Associate Dean of Students and Dean of First Year Students [Chris Sewell '05](#).

Campus drop-off: While I know how important drop-off day can be, public health protocols preclude us from allowing anyone except students into the residence halls. Our staff will be on hand to welcome students to campus and give them their room keys/codes. Families, we'll encourage you to ask your students to send you photos of their rooms, and we hope to welcome you into the residence halls on a future visit.

International students: We're especially mindful of our international students at Williams, and the challenges they may face in planning a return to campus. As of now, many embassies aren't processing visas, and the federal Student and Exchange Visitor Program hasn't yet issued complete guidance about how to manage enrollment issues. We'll provide information as soon as it's available, and are committed to assisting international students in enrolling for the fall (either in person or remotely) or taking time off. Please contact Associate Dean of Students and Director of International Student Services [Ninah Pretto](#) for more information about how to best move forward. Note that there will be multiple town hall sessions this week and next, where international students and families can ask questions. See the [Town Halls and Important Dates page](#) for dates and times.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Public health measures: Everyone who returns will be required to wear a mask or face covering and practice social distancing in all public spaces. There will be strict limits on the nature and size of gatherings. We'll all have to do without aspects of life that we value: people will have to wear masks in class and sit at least six feet apart. Meals won't be shared around a dining hall table, but will be carry-out only. Essential staff—those whose campus presence is deemed necessary by their supervisors—may have to work in shifts or on rotations. Please [check the FAQs and attend the town halls](#) for more information about what fall will look like, including plans for lab- and performance-based courses.

Staff and faculty will be provided with information and training on workplace safety later this summer. And managers will be asked to hold departmental meetings in July where these issues can be discussed.

Assessing conditions: We'll remain in close contact with our medical colleagues over the coming months. Currently, cases are spiking in some parts of the country, and if the situation worsens significantly and persistently before September I may have to reconsider our decision to convene. Even after the term starts I'll reluctantly have to reserve the option of announcing a mid-semester shutdown if conditions require. The ability of the college and our local healthcare systems to manage an increased caseload would feature significantly in such a decision. I hope, of course, that I'll never have to make such a decision, since I'm well aware that the disruptions and challenges of the global pandemic have proven exceptionally difficult for our students and their

families. Nevertheless, conditions are uncertain enough that it's impossible to guarantee the completion of an in-person semester.

Testing: Covid-19 testing will be required for all students. There will also be testing for faculty and staff. Tests will be administered upon arrival and then weekly throughout the rest of the in-person term. We've arranged with the [Eli and Edythe L. Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard](#) to provide testing via a minimally invasive, self-administered nasal swab, and conducted under observation by a trained professional. All testing will be free.

Following their initial Covid-19 test on arrival students will be required to quarantine in their rooms, with bathroom access only, for 24–48 hours until the results are confirmed. Meals will be delivered to rooms during this time. We realize the seriousness and inconvenience of this measure, but it's the only way we can ascertain that everyone has tested negative for the virus before they join the campus community.

Positive cases: We anticipate that cases of Covid-19 will be diagnosed on campus. The question is not whether they'll happen, but how we'll care for people who get sick and also contain the spread. Our plan establishes protocols for on-campus treatment, quarantine and isolation as needed.

If a student becomes symptomatic, [Student Health and Wellness Services](#) will first treat them via telemedicine, with multiple daily check-ins and temperature-taking. Meals will be delivered, and the student's health will be carefully monitored. If symptoms worsen, the student will be promptly transported to one of our local hospitals. The heads of those hospitals have confirmed that they have capacity, and the college will use CDC-recommended protocols for transportation.

I should note that the leaders of our local medical systems, [Berkshire Health Systems](#) and [Southwestern Vermont Medical Center](#), have told me that they feel it's reasonable to welcome students back. I want to thank them for their counsel during our decision process.

Community Commitment: In order to make the fall semester work and avoid spreading serious illness, everyone at Williams will be required to sign a Community Commitment that describes and confirms your promise to uphold public health measures and commit to everyone's safety. Copies will be sent to all faculty, staff and students later this summer, and you'll be asked to sign and return it before spending time on campus.

STUDENT LIFE AND ATHLETICS

Residence life: Students, you should be prepared for the possibility that we'd have to relocate you into a different room at some point during the term to create space for quarantining or isolation. We'll certainly work to avoid this, but we recommend that you

do what you can to significantly minimize the number of possessions you bring with you, since that will make it easier for you to move if required.

A room draw process is being finalized, and [Director of Student Life Doug Schiazza](#) will communicate the details to you shortly.

Athletics: The NESCAC Conference and the NCAA have issued statements about expectations for a safe return to play. Those statements leave a great deal to the discretion of individual schools, but strongly recommend a phased approach to return to play and competition. This means that any athletic engagement will begin and proceed slowly and with an abundance of caution. Knowing how important athletics is in the lives of many students, we hope to provide opportunities for team engagement. Teams will be able to practice outside in small groups if they adhere to social distancing guidelines, and may progress to more game-like practice activities if conditions improve. However it has been decided that Williams fall sports teams will not travel and compete during the fall semester. Our decision has been guided by the utmost attention to safety protocols to ensure the health and safety of our athletes, coaches, staff and community. Decisions about winter and spring teams have not yet been made. The Athletics Department will host a special town hall this week devoted to information and discussion of these issues. You'll find details on the [Covid-19 website](#).

Student life: The decision to reopen has many ramifications, and while we've resolved important initial questions about the curriculum, we naturally have many decisions yet to work through about student organizations, activities, and what we often call the co-curriculum. Many of our student clubs and organizations are likely to be active, but will have to operate in new ways given public health considerations. Groups may meet virtually or convene in small groups with social distancing. There will be limits on the size and design of parties and social events. We'll share further information in the coming weeks about performing arts, outdoors programs and other activities.

I unfortunately need to acknowledge that we won't have all the forms of support on campus this fall that would be available during a conventional term. I'm attuned to the ways these limitations can intersect with inequality, and we're working to head off such concerns. For example, since health protocols preclude us from offering in-person counseling at [Integrative Wellbeing Services](#), we'll expand our telemedicine options through a combination of IWS options and an expanded relationship with [TalkSpace](#), which will also give students access to a greater number of counselors nationwide who share their identities or experiences. You'll find more information about this on the [IWS site](#). I can't be overly optimistic, however: the reality is that all of us will have to adjust expectations. I encourage students and families to think about the changes in therapeutic services and other areas as you make your decisions about fall, and to [be in touch with the Dean's office](#) if you have questions.

COST AND FINANCIAL AID

Cost of attendance: Williams is reducing our [comprehensive fee](#) by 15 percent for all families on a one-time basis for academic year 2020–21, relative to the amount we'd previously announced for the coming year. Families on financial aid will have their expected family contribution reduced by 15 percent. This reduction recognizes the fact that the pandemic and associated challenges are requiring us to cancel Winter Study as well as fall athletics competition and many student activities, among other opportunities that we usually encourage families to expect as part of their student's education.

We'll also waive the work-study contribution for the entire 2020-21 academic year for all students receiving financial aid. And the annual Student Activities Fee will be eliminated for the year, for all students.

I also remind you of our [decision](#) last winter to eliminate the summer earnings contribution this summer and to maintain our previous commitment to a no-questions-asked free summer, with an additional free summer possible through the waiver process. Those policies will continue in 2020-21.

Finally, students who are fully remote will, of course, not be charged room and board for the time that they're not on campus.

For information about the updated Cost of Attendance, please visit the [FAQs](#). Financial aid recipients will receive an email shortly with information about their updated parent contribution.

Because tuition is paid in exchange for teaching, academic credit, and non-academic services that the college will provide, regardless of whether we're in-person or remote, please understand that tuition (excepting room and board) will be the same for all students, whether they participate in-person or remotely.

As many details as I've included here, there are many, many more found in the [FAQs](#). Still other details are in the process of being confirmed, as you've noticed from the number of times in this message that I've explained how someone will be in touch with more information soon. We're thinking about everything from how room selection will be handled to ensuring the safe delivery of food staples and office supplies. And of course at the heart of everything our faculty are transforming the curriculum to deliver the best education they can envision.

Our ability to approach this moment carefully and thoughtfully is a testament to the commitment of the faculty, staff and students on our working groups for [in-person](#) and [remote](#) semesters, and on the [COVID-19 Operations and Business Continuity Committee](#). I hope you'll join me in thanking them when you can. My decision was also informed by numerous discussions with local, state and national public health experts and officials, counterparts at schools around the country, the college's [Senior Staff](#) and our [Board of Trustees](#). And of course the many of you who shared ideas, questions and concerns in town halls, meetings and emails, with the goal of making sure that, whatever decision Williams made, we'd make it well.

With the voices and suggestions of so many wise and caring people resounding in my mind, I concluded that the right path for Williams was to reconvene, and to do so flexibly, so that we could offer as many of you as possible as much chance as possible to judge what's best for yourselves.

As troubled as the world is, and as cautious as we'll have to be in reconvening on campus, our work—both outward- and inward-facing—is only growing more valuable, more urgent, more necessary, and more rewarding all the time.

I look forward to the careful process of returning to that project together.

Sincerely,

Maud