

Maud S. Mandel

to WILLIAMS-ALL

Williams students, faculty and staff,

This message includes what we hope will be good news about spring return and commencement.

To jump straight to the heart of things, we're confirming that Williams will start spring semester as previously scheduled, including on-campus study for those already approved for that status. And we will also begin planning for an in-person celebration for seniors this spring, with strict safety precautions.

As always, both plans will have to be subject to our ongoing review of the public health and safety outlook. We would announce a change in course if the situation worsened significantly, but hope not to have to do so.

Regarding the **return for spring**, students who have already been approved to study on-campus should plan to come back on your scheduled arrival dates, which span from February 10 through 14. Given the current spread of Covid and the new strains that have emerged, you should expect that campus public health protocols will be enhanced, and some of our rules about socializing and off-campus activity will be stricter than the ones we imposed last fall. Marlene will send a followup email soon with details so you'll know what to expect.

Regarding **commencement**, the college will plan an in-person ceremony to celebrate the senior class (details still to be determined), shaped by rules about gathering size. We're considering several models and will be in touch with our seniors as plans come together. Sadly, we do already know we won't be able to allow attendance by families or other off-campus guests, or students from the three other classes. Instead, we'll live-stream the event worldwide so that everyone can share the day as fully as possible under the circumstances. We know this is disappointing news, and as parents we recognize how difficult it is not to be able to attend your own student's graduation. Nevertheless, current conditions nationally and locally make it too risky to consider a larger gathering, and our focus is on ensuring the seniors can have their best day, while letting you participate in the safest way possible.

College Marshal Jay Thoman '82 and Director of Commencement and Academic Events Carrie Green '84 will seek input from the senior class officers to plan a worthy ceremony and Class Day program.

We also expect that there will be some special events for seniors. However, because of the pandemic they're certainly not going to be what we're used to. We expect that it won't be possible to hold the Mt. Hope Dinner Dance or Jazz Brunch, for example.

Instead, we'll work with the senior class officers to design smaller and Covid-safe celebrations that can be condensed into a single weekend, again for safety reasons.

Spring 2021 graduates who will be off-campus this spring will be allowed to return to Williams and participate in graduation as long as you quarantine on arrival and participate in campus Covid testing. On-campus housing will be provided and the college will offer financial support to cover travel expenses for all aided students in this group. Again, we'll send further details about all of this soon.

As you may recall, when we canceled last spring's commencement for the Class of 2020, we expressed hope that the class could return for a celebration once it was safe to do so. Given our regretful decisions to disallow off-campus guests for commencement 2021 and to cancel this spring's reunions, it's too soon to contemplate inviting the Class of 2020 back home. We look forward to considering the possibilities once it's safe.

The conditions and qualifiers in this letter are an inevitable part of planning an in-person semester and graduation amidst a global pandemic. But we don't want to let those constraints obscure our true joy that we can welcome students back for both events. We're excited that we'll see so many of you this spring. For those who will remain off-campus, we're equally eager to see you back as soon as possible, too.

Again, the college will be in touch soon with more details about both plans. In the meantime, thank you for your patience so we and our colleagues could provide you with the best and safest options for this spring.

Maud and Marlene