

Hello All,

I write to you at the end of a long week, for Winthrop and for our nation. We find ourselves in the midst of many simultaneous tests to the systems that we rely on to organize our personal, professional, and civic lives. In moments of crisis, we may not always have the ability to solve everything at once. But we always have the ability to demonstrate our values as we try to move through any crisis that presents itself.

In responding to the significant personal, institutional, and public challenges that COVID-19 has presented us with, members of Academic and Senior Leadership have been and will continue to make decisions informed by the well-being of the students we serve and the communities of people we employ. To that end, we are making decisions driven by our mission, strategic goals, and the well-being of our students, faculty, and staff using the best information we have on hand at any given moment, as our knowledge about the virus and the path of the pandemic changes and grows.

President Hynd shared news yesterday about our Fall 2020 return plans. I know you have all been anxious to hear the institutional plan, which grows directly from many of your efforts to consider how best to deliver instruction and services to our students in the midst of so many unknowns. I appointed a task force comprised of a subset of Academic Leadership Council to tackle what academic instruction should look like, knowing what we know now and considering how to best provide a Winthrop-worthy learning experience to all of our new and returning students in the midst of future unknowns. They produced a four-page document, which we will share many more details from in the near future.

The primary recommendation was that we provide a healthy mix of in-person, hybrid, and online courses in Fall 2020, taking into consideration both our need to remain flexible and retain high quality instruction regardless of the modality we use to deliver our courses. So how do we do this?

By moving select courses online, we will create space in our physical classrooms to spread out and provide physical distancing. By shifting to hybrid modes, we build in additional pedagogical flexibility that will shift some content to digital delivery, allowing us to do high-impact in person work whenever we gather together with students. When we provide fully in-person courses, we will move to bigger spaces, allowing distancing, and/or split large courses into break-out sessions, to insert the needed distance into our learning spaces. Conversely, when we offer fully online courses, we will make efforts to provide synchronous contact points, to ensure those students have the opportunity to build visual connections for online students with their faculty and classmates, even though many fully online courses promote a largely asynchronous environment. The focus will be on high quality teaching, high quality learning, and the providing the overall high quality Winthrop experience on which we pride ourselves.

We have also decided to modify our dates of instruction to minimize key travel points at Fall Break and Thanksgiving, so that when students go home for the holidays, they will stay home until Spring 2021 commences. Dr. Hynd shared the preliminary schedule adjustments yesterday and as a result of feedback and additional conversations, we will likely make additional tweaks before we lock in the fully revised calendar. For example, we are considering a full week off at Thanksgiving to provide for a less congested move-out window. Stay tuned for more updates next week. Our plan is to have any adjustments to the schedule and calendar complete prior to June 9, when Orientation gets fully underway. We will also look to key faculty leaders and student services staff who stand ready to assist returning students with questions about registration changes that may result from our modifications to course modalities.

Recommendations on extracurricular and special events are part of the full plan as well. My thanks to the team of Deans and Academic leaders who have been putting in so much time to re-consider our instructional models, faculty and staff development supports, and the guidance we need to put in place to be ready for whatever comes next. The result will be a plan with resiliency built in. I am confident that no matter what comes, we have the talent at Winthrop to sustain the learning environment that makes such an important impact on our students and our community.

Have a great weekend, everyone.

Adrienne