Fall 2020

Safe Return Plan

July 2, 2020
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the President 1  
Safe Return Team and Subgroup Participants 4  
Preface to Safe Return Plan 7  
Pillars of a Safe Campus Environment / Mutual Contract of Social Responsibility 8  
  - Personal Protective Equipment 9  
  - Physical Barriers 9  
  - Hygiene 9  
  - Cleaning and Disinfecting 10  
  - Testing and Tracing 10  
Plans for Academic Program 11  
  - Blended 11  
  - Anticipating a Pivot 12  
  - Equity & Access 13  
  - Technology 14  
Space Planning 15  
First-Year Student Services 16  
Residence Life 17  
Food Service 18  
Library 18  
Athletics 18  
Health Monitoring and Containment 19  
Student Wellbeing and Mental Health 20  
Campus Restrictions 22  
  - Remote Work 22  
  - Visitor Access / Campus Events 22  
  - Communal Spaces 23  
  - Mandatory Employee Training and Compliance 23  
Other Safe Campus Subcommittee Reports 24  
  - New Student Recruitment 24  
  - Retention of Students 26  
  - Communications 26  
  - External Relations 27
Appendices

Appendix A: Massachusetts Safe Return Plan
Appendix B: Education Plan
June 18, 2020

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students,

I am pleased to announce that Worcester State University is in a position to welcome students back to campus for the Fall 2020 semester, both in our classrooms and in our residence halls, provided the Commonwealth has progressed to at least Phase Three of reopening by mid-August. Classes will begin, as had been previously scheduled, on September 2.

Many courses not previously designated as “online” will be offered with some face-to-face and some off-site instruction (blended). Even when offered at a distance, many classes will take place at the scheduled time (synchronous), allowing for interaction, and many classes will also be recorded, offering students flexibility. We are planning for as much in-class instruction as we can safely provide.

Resident students will be housed in single- or double-occupancy rooms, with a portion of our housing capacity reserved for any quarantining needs.

While everyone is eager to resume the full collegiate experience, the fall semester will look substantially different than any one that has preceded it. New requirements and limitations will include:

- The wearing of face covering/masks or other appropriate face coverings on campus;
- Severe restrictions on who may come to campus from outside our community;
- An on-campus population that is less than half of our usual capacity, where most of our staff are working from home;
- De-densifying the number of students on campus at any given time;
- The use of either face covering/masks or face shields by our faculty while teaching;
- Restrictions on the use of common areas, and changes to foot traffic patterns;
- New ways to access the library and its resources, which will be detailed in a plan developed by its director; and
- A reconfigured dining experiences.

Guidance for Decisions

Our comprehensive plan meets the objectives that Governor Baker’s higher educational working group laid out as part of the state’s safe reopening plan (https://www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-higher-education). Campuses that opt to bring students back to campus are to do so in a way that protects the health of the campus—and the broader community, while enabling students to progress towards their educational goals. Our plan achieves both.
Academic Calendar for Fall 2020
We aim to complete next semester as we begin it, and we do not intend to alter next semester’s academic calendar. We recognize, however, that a resurgence of COVID-19 could require us to pivot to distance learning instruction modalities at some point in the semester, in accordance with public health guidance.

Athletics
Our MASCAC conference and the NCAA are expected to make announcements regarding fall sports early in July, and both incoming and returning student athletes will be hearing from our Athletics Department.

Keeping Coronavirus Risk Low
We will engage in safe health practices to keep our coronavirus risk low. Signs throughout campus will remind us to wash our hands frequently, wear face coverings and/or social distance, and wipe down surface areas. We will reinforce the message that no one should come to campus while sick. New cleaning protocols are in place, and ventilation improvements are underway.

Such measures work. And we engage in them not just to protect ourselves, but to protect others. In fact, I've been encouraged by one aspect of the pandemic: it’s spurred us to reach out to others with care and concern. I encourage everyone to ask a member of the Lancer community how they are doing. Let’s pay that forward as we come back to campus.

We are reviewing state guidance for higher education COVID-19 testing, which was released Wednesday. A symptom-checker app will be part of our toolkit for addressing the virus, both so that students and employees will know whether they should come to campus each day, and to indicate who might be symptomatic, and therefore should be tested. We are prepared to test them.

Accommodations
We stand ready to accommodate students and staff who may be at higher risk than others for contracting COVID-19, to ensure that they can learn and work. Students are encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services at 508-929-8733, and employees should contact Human Resources at 508-929-8053.

Unique Fall
The next semester will be unique. While we may learn some things from a blended learning approach, we will never lose sight of this hallmark of a Worcester State education: our dedicated and outstanding faculty, whose passion is teaching and who advise and get to know their students. We anticipate that the spring semester would bring us far closer to our traditional format. We have no doubt that, once a COVID-19 vaccine is widely available, we will once again offer the full collegiate experience—with face-to-face, full-capacity classes and the whole range of on-campus activities for everyone to enjoy, in person.
The Safe Return Plan for Fall 2020, highlights of which are indicated on the attached, ensures we will reconvene this fall in accordance with guidelines established by the CDC and the Massachusetts Departments of Public Health and Higher Education, while prioritizing student success. I want to congratulate the many employees who diligently and quickly prepared planning documents and teed up key decisions for Executive Cabinet and me over the past month -- some 145 of them (70 faculty), in cooperation with union leadership. Plans have been developed for ten areas. I’ve touched on:

- Academic Contingencies;
- Facilities Use; and
- Mental Health and Wellness.

Other plans cover: Budget, Communications, External Relations, Federal Stimulus, Recruitment, Retention, and Wrap-Around Services/Student Support.

More implementation details will follow, and the plan each group submitted will be posted, in the coming days and weeks. Even as we release our plans, I acknowledge that we continue to face uncertainties and shifting guidance from officials. We will make adjustments to them as circumstances warrant. You are encouraged to frequently check our COVID-19 website [https://www.worcester.edu/Safe-Return/](https://www.worcester.edu/Safe-Return/).

No doubt members of the Worcester State community will have many questions about how we will be returning to campus. One venue for addressing them will be the Campus Conversation, via Zoom, this afternoon at 2 p.m. You should have received an email invitation with details for joining in. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Barry M. Maloney
President
Worcester State University Safe Return Team

Carl A. Herrin, Chair  
Julie Kazarian, Co-chair

Anthony Adade  Tom McNamara  
Donald Brickman  John Meany  
Madeline Campbell  Syamak Moattari  
Andrea Dever  Susan Moore  
Joseph Dicarlo  Michael Mudd  
Dawn Eades  Laura Murphy  
Kathleen Eichelroth  Kristen O’Reilly  
Kevin Fenlon  Katey Palumbo  
Ryan Forsythe  Russ Pottle  
Lisa Gaimari  Jennifer Quinn  
Tara Hancock  Emily Soltano  
David Needham  Maureen Stokes  
Jason Kapurch  Tammy Tebo  
Thomas Kelley  Henry Theriault  
Roberta Kyle  Jonathan Walker  
Linda Larrivee  Lois Wims  
Stacey Luster  

Kathleen Rogan, Note taker
## Safe Return Working Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Purpose/Function/Charge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>Focus on development of written, video, social media, and other virtual messaging strategies intended to communicate affirmative and positive information about the University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic contingency plans- Fall</td>
<td>Exploration and development of viable options for course delivery through various modalities &amp; address diverse instructional needs of students in order to ensure successful completion of academic work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention of continuing students</td>
<td>Maintaining a high rate of persistence among currently enrolled students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of new students</td>
<td>Enrolling a suitably sized incoming class of first year and transfer students, as well as graduate and other enrollments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External relations</td>
<td>Focused on maintaining positive relationships with the Worcester-area community &amp; other key stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal stimulus coordination</td>
<td>Capitalizing on available federal funding through the CARES Act and other federal stimulus legislation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of campus facilities</td>
<td>Utilization of campus facilities on a temporary basis in service of local high-priority needs, as well as planning for a return to “regular” campus life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health &amp; emotional well-being support</td>
<td>Providing optimal support of students in the context of the uncertainty of current circumstances, as well as to advise on the well-being of the University’s employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrap-around academic support/preparation</td>
<td>Ensuring the successful transition from high school to university for our future incoming students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Combined Safe Return Subgroup Participants

as of June 26, 2020

Anthony Adade
Rosemary Ahmadi
Jeremy Andreatta
Nathan Angelo
Elena Arranz
Daron Barnard
Mark Beaudry
Matt Bejune
Elizabeth Bيدinger
Laxmi Bissoondial
Dean Bowen
Donald Brickman
Erika Briesacher
Jodi Briggs-Pickett
Donald Bullens
Paula Bylaska-Davies
Kristine Camacho
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William Chabourne
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Anthony Dell’Aera
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Kathleen Eichelroth
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Sue Foo
Ryan Forsythe
Charlie Fox
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Joanne Gallagher
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Maria Gariepy
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Roger Greenwell
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Cheryl Hersperger
Jennifer Hood-Degener
Yan Hu
Eihab Jaber
Brittany Jeye
Christian Kaniu
Bonnie Kanner
Jason Kapurch
Nikki Kapurch
Joshua Katz
Julie Kazarian
Thomas Kelley
Margaret Kerr
Douglas
Kowalewski
RobertA Kyle
Mark LaCroix
Linda Larrivee
Hana Lasell
Angela Latter
Kelly Laviolette
Robin Leo
Stacey Luster
Nabin Malaker
Frances Manocchio
Mary Jo Marion
Sharon McDonald
Michael McKenna
Sarah McMaster
Kristie McNamara
Tom McNamara
John Meany
Kenneth Melnick
Susanna Meyer
Susan Mitroka-Batsford
Syamak Moattari
Susan Moore
Michael Mudd
Charisse Murphy
Laura Murphy
Timothy Murphy
David Needham
Kristen Nelson
Eric Nichols
Christie Nigro
Sam O’Connell
Steven Oliver
Sandra Olson
Kristen O’Reilly
Michelle Page
Katey Palumbo
Eileen Perez
Andrew Piazza
Mim Plavin-Masterman
Sarah Potrikus
Russ Pottle
Joseph Quattrucci
Robin Quill
Jennifer Quinn
Hilda Ramirez
Brittney Rende
Lawrence Roberge
Kathleen Rogan
Nicole Rosa
Adam Saltsman
Christina Santana
MaryLynn Saul
Nancy Sheehan
Hardeep Sidhu
Elizabeth Siler
Danielle Shaver
Kenny Smith
Emily Soltano
Champika Soysa
Maureen Stokes
Sarah Strout
Colleen Sullivan
Seth Surgan
Louise Taylor
Tammy Tebo
Karen Tessner
Henry Theriault
Tanya Trudell
Marcela Uribe-Jennings
Jaime Vallejos
Sebastian Velez
Don Vescio
Mark Wagner
Marc Wagoner
Jonathan Walker
Elizabeth Wark
Cleve Wiese
Lois Wims
Karen Woods
Weierman
Maribeth Wrobel
Weichu Xu
Adam Zahler
Preface to Safe Return Plan

This Worcester State University Fall 2020 Safe Return Plan represents the framework for the University’s approach to start of the 2020-2021 academic year. In the context of the ongoing global pandemic, we will strive to provide a high-quality higher education learning experience for all of our students while maintaining a healthy and safe environment for the entire University community. We recognize that the key to being successful in this regard rests primarily on the shoulders of our excellent and dedicated faculty—all of whom have spent tremendous effort preparing for the various instructional modalities this plan outlines and that we, as a university, must embrace in light of the pandemic’s impact on us and society.

We are in awe of the remarkable commitment by our returning students to continue and complete the academic work they have begun prior to this health crisis, and we are equally impressed by the strong desire of our new students to join us this fall to launch (or continue) their higher education ambitions with us. Welcome! Your commitment (and that of your families and supporters) to our re-imagined educational enterprise, including its clear new set of personal responsibilities, will be a key measure of our shared success this coming year.

Our staff have also spent innumerable hours working (mostly remotely) since April to assemble this plan and then begin its implementation which reflects their continued commitment to our students’ success and our institutional mission.

This report will be updated and refreshed as developments – health-related and fiscal, to name just two – dictate. A live, contemporary version of this document will therefore be maintained and appropriately annotated to provide the current details of our plan going forward. Please check back to our website periodically to see additions, amendments, and corrections.

Thank you.
Pillars of a Safe Campus Environment

Mutual Contract of Social Responsibility

Because Worcester State University cannot guarantee zero cases, nor prevent all community infections, we must expect that every member of the University community will be committed to creating a culture of safety and accountability to maintain a healthy campus. Everyone who comes to campus for classes and work must understand and acknowledge this reality. Every member of the Worcester State community must also acknowledge that they have a responsibility to themselves and their fellow Lancers to do their part to be safe, honor restrictions, follow appropriate public health guidelines, including those from the Centers for Disease Control, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and the Worcester city Department of Health, and comply with all written University guidance posted or otherwise communicated to the campus community.

So that we may create a culture of safety and accountability throughout the Worcester State University community, every member of our community is expected to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Participate in training exercises to learn the required safety practices and navigate the new normal on campus;
- Receive the flu vaccination in the fall, subject to medical guidance from a personal health care provider;
- Self-monitor for and report all COVID-19 symptoms using the University-designated reporting method (WSU expects to select a self-reporting app later this summer);
- Practice essential personal safety practices, including wearing appropriate face coverings, and practicing enhanced personal hygiene such as frequent hand washing and sanitizer use, abiding by safe social distancing practices, and following all safety instructions and signage;
- Ensure that all personal belongings and all living, studying, and working spaces are kept clean; and
- Participate in testing and contact tracing under prescribed protocols designated by the University and public health officials.

The key pillars to maintaining a safe and healthy campus, and fulfilling our mutual social responsibility to all in the Worcester State community, are articulated below.
Social Distancing and Face Coverings/Masks

- When possible, keep six feet of distance between you and someone else.
- Individuals will also be required to wear face coverings on WSU grounds and in WSU buildings.
- Failure to comply will violate the mutual contract of social responsibility.
- Refusal to comply may result in immediate removal from campus, exclusion from campus, and/or other disciplinary action.
- All employees and students will be provided two washable face masks.
- Facilities staff, University Police, and other designated employees will have the option to use N95 face masks to be provided by WSU.
- Disposable face masks will be readily available for individuals who forget face covering at key distribution centers across campus.

PPE Inventory

WSU has purchased supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to provide to students and all employees upon return to campus for the fall semester. Purchases include various types of face covering/masks, face shields and gloves. Procedures for fall semester distribution are under development.

Physical Barriers and Guides

WSU will install plexiglass or similar barriers in areas where close contact will occur (e.g., front, public-facing desks, and reception areas). WSU may install markings on floors and signage to guide traffic flow and social distancing where lines typically form, as appropriate.

Hygiene Protocols

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “regular handwashing is one of the best ways to remove germs, avoid getting sick, and prevent the spread of germs to others.”

The University will—

- Promote handwashing and/or sanitizing, consistent with CDC guidance.
- Provide employees and students with supplies and standards for sanitizing personal work areas, workstations, desks, lecterns, plexiglass, and similar high-touch surfaces.
Cleaning and Disinfecting

The University will—

- Provide additional equipment for Facilities’ use in daily sanitizing activities.
- Provide additional materials and disinfecting solutions for employees to use for self-performing sanitizing in both instructional and personal use spaces.
- Establish daily sanitizing protocols for all campus physical spaces.

Testing and Contact Tracing

The testing protocols and approach to contact tracing remain a work in progress. The University will be testing residential students who are symptomatic of COVID-19, and referring employees for testing to local testing facilities or testing locations available through their health care providers.

Plans for testing the student population are nearly complete, and will be included in a future version of this report. Additionally, the University is weighing the option of ‘surveillance testing’ of its residential student population—balancing its reported efficacy at identifying and preventing an expanded community spread of the virus on campus against the considerable cost of such testing.

Tied to any testing will be a process known as contact tracing—a public health process used to quickly track close contacts with an infected individual in order to identify other individuals with the virus and break the path of contagion. Together with other tactics—like those mentioned above—contact tracing is considered a key method to reduce the infection rate for COVID-19.

The University’s Health Services is already a part of the network for contact tracing of communicable diseases, and has been active with Worcester’s Public Health Department with regard to prospective tracing involving our campus community since the outbreak emerged in March. The University plans to expand its contact tracing capacity in conjunction with Worcester’s Public Health Department.
Plans for the University’s Academic Program, Fall 2020

The University’s priority is to provide a safe and equitable teaching and learning environment that will maximize student success on the way toward their academic goals. This plan anticipates that Worcester State University will utilize a combination of face-to-face, blended, and online course delivery. Most classes will be delivered in blended format, as described below.

*This plan is also premised on the successful move by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to Phase 3 of the Governor’s state reopening plan in advance of the start of the academic year (for a copy of that plan, visit here).*

A Blended Opening

Worcester State University will open in-person for fall 2020 in accordance with its previously published academic calendar and with as many on-campus learning opportunities available to students as possible.

Worcester State’s approach to education capitalizes on the faculty-to-student interaction and relationship, and students’ interaction through learning with each other. This has been our cornerstone since 1874 and with the advances to current our learning environment, we continue to explore unique, innovative ways to engage students. Still, this approach must recognize and plan for:

- The health needs of students, faculty and staff.

While we intend to be open for business, our approach leverages blended and online learning both to de-densify classroom spaces and to accommodate student and faculty health needs as they may arise. In addition, we will be prepared to move academic programming to remote learning modalities, if and when public health developments so dictate.

Fall 2020 classes will be delivered primarily in a blended format, except for those classes already designated to be delivered fully online. The University’s priority in course format is blended courses with in-person, synchronous sessions.

Blended courses would be offered in one of the following formats:

- Synchronous delivery, whether partially in-person or streamed with video conferencing technology for students learning remotely; and
• Asynchronous delivery. Online learning with priority given to blended courses with in-person synchronous sessions.

With blended classes, between 25 percent and 99 percent of course activities could be completed virtually.

Faculty and department chairs, in conjunction with their respective deans, will work together to identify the days when courses will take place on campus to ensure an equitable distribution of the number of in-person classes.

With regard to students with accommodations approved by the University’s Office of Student Accessibility Services (SAS), a variety of approaches may be taken to ensure equitable learning environments. Such approaches can be identified and cataloged during the summer, in partnership with SAS.

For faculty accommodations:
• Faculty members should have the option to teach fully online, with the approval of the department chair and dean, if the instructor is experienced in online education, or as a reasonable accommodation when a qualifying condition is documented and approved through Human Resources.
• If a fully online teaching schedule is requested via HR, other accommodation methods (such as teaching remotely, wherein class meetings are held using Blackboard) will be offered.
• Faculty will be expected to teach in distance setting to the same high standards found in a classroom setting. Therefore, faculty are expected to attend workshops or training sessions, or document their prior training, to meet the University’s academic standards in distance environment.

Anticipating a Pivot

Blended to fully remote—

• In the event that courses need to be moved to fully remote, all in-person, synchronous sessions of blended courses shall be poised to meet exclusively via Blackboard or other appropriate technology—in other words, in the Remote Synchronous modality. In this way, the prospect of a fall pivot from blended to fully remote would have a low impact on the scheduling and coordination of the synchronous aspect of a course.
• Similarly, the asynchronous portion of blended classes will not be significantly impacted because blended courses will have already been designed with substantial online content.
• By their nature, face-to-face/applied learning courses translate less readily to remote learning. To protect the face-to-face instructional environment, fall 2020 planning for face-to-face/applied learning courses will, insofar as possible, front-load active learning.

Equity and Access to Learning

While balancing campus safety and the goal of maximizing student success, it is vital that equity be a top priority, and that University continue to address issues of access as they may affect students with limited or no internet access.

Recognizing that the pandemic and its economic costs have disproportionately affected people of color, the University will:

• Consider how blended/online teaching modalities produce new kinds of inequities in access to digital technologies and off-campus learning environments.

• Commit resources to addressing those inequities. Digital and home-learning inequities during the ongoing pandemic represent an important retention concern for the institution, and a community imperative as an anchor of Worcester’s social fabric.

• Identify necessary resources, including:
  o Laptops for students who do not have them;
  o WiFi hotspots for those without internet access; and
  o Access to funding for any/all individual software needs that may arise as part of participating in blended and/or online courses.

• Carefully calibrate eligibility for the Student Emergency Fund, or other newly identified funding, including in consideration of full-time or part-time status, financial aid status, etc.
Technology

Faculty Support

To support a blended opening, the University expects to dedicate resources to aid with faculty course conversion. Preliminary efforts in this regard have been underway since May and will continue through the summer. Those include a set of faculty professional development sessions and trainings organized through the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), including participation by more than half of the faculty in Quality Matters programming. CTL and IT Services has an array of additional programming scheduled over the balance of the summer.

Additionally, the University has made preliminary commitments to acquire additional hardware and software intended to better facilitate the delivery of blended course offerings, and expects to commit additional resources as the summer proceeds.

The University recognizes that in order for faculty to convert large portions of face-to-face coursework into online and blended modalities, they may record lectures, design course modules aligned with Quality Matters standards, and/or migrate significant amounts of content online (assignments, tests, etc.). To aid with those efforts, the University is weighing how it will best be able to assist with instructional design and IT support for Blackboard and related IT services.

University Learning Management System

To promote students’ ease of learning online and to assist the University in maintaining compliance with applicable policy, procedures, and law, the University restates that Blackboard is its official Learning Management Software (LMS), supported by IT Services. Consequently, instructors of blended or online classes are strongly encouraged to utilize Blackboard as a course’s central LMS. This will ensure that faculty members have the support they need, that IT can safeguard the privacy of the platform, and that students are positioned to succeed in online learning. While it is not obligatory that instructors utilize an LMS in their face-to-face courses, it is encouraged that an up-to-date syllabus be provided on Blackboard at a minimum. Ongoing Blackboard training is available for faculty.

Student Technology Considerations

While the use of a standard LMS is one component of an equitable blended/online learning plan for optimizing student learning, the University understands that several additional considerations must also be kept in mind, notably that students must have access to suitable laptop computers and high-speed internet as essential to completing blended,
online, and remote coursework. For fall 2020, Worcester State University has recommitted to its laptop requirement. Further, the University will support assisting students with internet access, both on campus and at their homes where access is limited or not available.

**Space planning**

In order to promote social distancing, WSU will limit the number of individuals in classrooms, offices, and buildings, as well as students assigned to residence halls and bathrooms. Capacity limits were determined using a formula that took into account the current occupancy and the recommended social distance per person. To this end, our facilities department has:

- Reviewed all academic instructional and specialized instructional space to determine occupancy capacities given social distancing requirements.
- Reviewed of all non-academic space to determine occupancy capacities given social distancing requirements.
- Determined campus-wide occupancy parameters for spaces previously used as communal spaces such as lounges, conference rooms, and convenience areas.
- Determined campus-wide occupancy parameters for elevator cabs.
- Evaluated pedestrian pathways for density, floor markings and signage.
- Evaluated air filtration in buildings to increase ventilation and flow as necessary.

New occupancy limits in each classroom and common areas will be posted and all students, faculty, and staff will be expected to respect those limits for the health and safety of our community.
First-Year Student Services

“Become a Lancer”

To best welcome, support and engage First-Year student to the Worcester State family, the Wraparound Subgroup developed programming that is academic as well as social, beginning this summer and continuing through the fall semester. Called Becoming a Lancer, this campus-wide initiative will give new students the information and resources they need to be successful at WSU.

The foundation of Becoming a Lancer is designated as “Enrolling a Lancer.” Under this heading. The first semester course schedule for Fall 2020 is created by an academic advisor in The Academic Success Center (ASC). Every First-Year student is assigned an academic advisor who will develop a relationship with the student as they transition to fall and will serve as a point person for them through the summer and their first year at WSU.

The next stage is “Engaging a Lancer,” which will provide first-year students connection points that are introduced in a monthly format. This includes programs like New Student Orientation, processes related to financial aid and student accounts along with health services and residence life. These offices will provide videos and content that will be added to a monthly roadmap to engage students around these topics. There will be opportunities under this stage that will allow students to socially interact with offices and one another.

The last phase is “Educating a Lancer.” First-Year students will be offered the opportunity to enroll in a free, three-credit course in Summer II (July 13-August 28). The course is focused on reengaging first-year students in an academic setting and establishing college-level expectations before they begin in the fall. The course will be offered online and in a flexible format. The course is asynchronous, meaning it does not meet at a specific time each week. This course is taken for credit and will count toward graduation.

Our faculty and staff are committed to supporting the specific needs of First-Year students and the programming within Becoming a Lancer addresses those needs.
Residence Life and Housing

Small Groups or “Households” Approach

Worcester State University intends to open fall 2020 with a residential component to campus life, utilizing its full residential capacity consistent with public health guidance and the University’s approach to health and safety.

Residence Life will model small communities or “households,” which are key components of our plan for living on campus.

A household may consist of just one student in a single room, two students in a double room, or suitemates, or it may include others on one floor who share a common bathroom.

Whatever the household’s makeup, students living in these defined spaces will be expected to live together in new ways. They must exercise careful control of how shared spaces are used and maintained, and everything from bathroom use to household cleaning to shared elevator use must be scheduled and coordinated. Students on floors with common bathrooms will be given daily schedules for bathroom use that will limit the number of students in a common bathroom at one time. Common bathrooms will receive frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces by our facilities staff, and each bathroom in apartments and suites will receive a starter kit of disinfecting products for students to wipe down surfaces before and after use.

Residence hall bed counts have been carefully reviewed and adjusted to reduce density. Some returning students may be impacted by the adjustment to the density of on-campus housing. In July, Residence Life will directly contact students whose room assignments have been impacted by the density reductions to identify a new room assignment prior to their arrival on campus.

Students living in apartments and suites with in-unit bathrooms typically arrange bathroom schedules to manage individual use, and this fall will be no different. Upon arrival, apartment and suite “households” will be asked to support each other and develop bathroom use and cleaning schedules.

The University has set aside student housing that will serve as quarantine and isolation accommodations for residential students. Residential students required to stay in one of these spaces will be supported with meals delivered by on-campus dining services and daily health monitoring by Student Health Services.

The traditional move-in process will be altered to allow students to bring belongings to campus over an extended time period in August. This will allow all students and staff to maintain a safe distance and reduce crowds during the process. Residents will receive information on how to sign up for a move-in time during the last week in July.
Food Service
WSU’s food service vendor, Chartwells, has developed a COVID-19 specific and customized plan called Path to Open based on CDC, local and state guidelines. Plans include:

- Reduced or eliminated guest seating capacity based on social distancing guidelines in all locations. Sheehan main dining hall will be reduced from 620 to 208 seats for in-person dining;
- Installation of plexiglass at all dining locations;
- Signage indicating customer pathways and floor queuing decals, as needed;
- Online/remote ordering to allow customers to place a to-go order ahead of time;
- Option for grab-and-go items at food service locations;
- Establishment, with Residence Life, of household dining times;
- A designated COVID-19 food safety manager;
- Delivery process for residential students in isolation or quarantine;
- Contactless catering and check in process; and
- Enhanced safety protocols for food services employees, dining locations, and guests (if permitted).

Library Services
During the Fall semester, the Library (https://www.worcester.edu/library) will continue to provide an extensive array of online resources and services. Users will be able to access all electronic resources including 250+ databases, 170,000+ eBooks, and 150,000+ subscriptions to journals, magazines, and newspapers. Library staff will provide individual research assistance by chat, email, and phone (http://libguides.worcester.edu/askus). Library instruction for classes will be provided online in synchronous and asynchronous formats in conjunction with the growing collection of tutorials, and research guides developed by Library staff (http://libguides.worcester.edu/).

In partnership with other University offices and departments, the Library continues to investigate offering in-person services following public health guidelines to ensure the health and safety of all who visit the Library and the Learning Resource Center. Subsequent plans will be announced as they become available.

Athletics
Our MASCAC conference and the NCAA are expected to make announcements regarding fall sports in July, and both incoming and returning student athletes will be hearing from the WSU Athletics Department when those decisions are finalized.
Health Monitoring

Department of Student Health Services (SHS)

As the primary source of medical care for students on campus, Health Services has prepared a detailed report on what is required for a safe return to this campus. This includes a list of necessary supplies, staffing, and physical considerations of current office space. The report also includes recommendations for isolation and quarantine spaces as outlined by the American College Health Association. WSU Health Services is benefited by having a long-term director and a strong relationship with the Worcester Department of Public Health.

SHS will be the primary contact for the receipt and dissemination of information related to a reported COVID-19 positive cases on campus. SHS will follow established protocols and guidelines for contact tracing, testing, and reporting, and will work with the Office of Communications and Marketing if information needs to be shared with the campus community.

Containment

Healthy Campus
Mandatory isolation or stay at home for symptomatic individuals (coughing, sneezing, fever, rashes or any symptoms).

Testing

Testing will be a key part of identifying those ill with COVID-19 and their contacts.

WSU Student Health Services (SHS) will continue to coordinate offsite testing for symptomatic students. WSU is currently assessing the feasibility of conducting symptomatic testing on campus.

WSU has commenced negotiations with The Broad Institute in order to secure the capacity to offer asymptomatic testing as deemed prudent, based upon availability, reliability, and effectiveness in reducing the transmission of COVID-19.

Due to the congregate nature of on campus learning, housing, and recreation, WSU has established a robust plan for self-quarantine/isolation, and contact tracing.

Contact tracing

SHS is the “Command Center” to notify the Department of Public Health when a student tests positive for COVID-19 or a close contact of someone who identified positive.

SHS will receive additional oversight from a temporary Public Health Manager, supported by an additional Nurse Practitioner.
Self-quarantine/Isolation

Out-of-state/international students may require early move in to complete two-week quarantine.

Residents who are awaiting testing results will quarantine/self-isolate at their permanent off-campus residence, if feasible, or in their assigned space on campus, under the direction of SHS.

Student Wellbeing and Mental Health

The University has a long-standing commitment to the wellbeing and mental health of its students. This has included being a JED campus(https://www.jedcampus.org/about/), through which WSU has enhanced its mental health outreach, programs, and protocols; and established a WSU JED team.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the University and its Counseling Services have emphasized several elements of its JED strategic plan to meet the diverse mental health needs of our students during these times, and to ensure a culture of care relative to mental health and wellbeing campus wide. This focus serves to increase help-seeking behaviors, access to care, supporting students in transition, social connectedness, gatekeeper training, and aid with identifying students at risk.

Training

The University will increase mental health and wellbeing gatekeeper training going into fall 2020 by educating faculty, staff, and students on recognizing, responding, and referring students in distress. These trainings include Resident Assistants (who live in the residence halls) as well as members of the athletic department coaching staff and trainers. These trainings, facilitated by counseling center staff with a trauma informed focus, are informed by data specific to the WSU student population and nationally. Trainings will further focus on understanding referral protocols for both emergent and non-emergent scenarios.

First-Year Student Support

First-year students will be supported in their transition to WSU in a number of ways. EVERFI Mental Health and Diversity and Inclusion modules have been added to the already existing AlcoholEDU, sexual violence, and prescription drug pre-matriculation programs. These online programs will be introduced sequentially to first year students beginning in August and running through October. Virtual new student and parent orientation programs will include an increased presence of information relating to transition, self-care, and information on how to access campus mental health resources and supports. These programs will also serve to connect students in an effort to develop a sense of community and belonging in these difficult times.

Outreach Efforts

Worcester State University Safe Return Plan Fall 2020
July 2, 2020
Counseling Services will continue mental health outreach efforts to both new and returning students. In an effort to meet the diverse needs of our students, Counseling Services will offer individual counseling sessions via telehealth and some safe in-person sessions. In collaboration with the WSU marketing department, the development of a wellness hub-website landing page will soon be launched. All wellness-related resources will be housed on this page. This will assist the University in communicating to both internal and external community members WSU’s commitment to holistic education and wellbeing.
Campus Restrictions

Remote Work
WSU Policy on Remote Work
- Human Resources will extend the opportunity for staff to telework whenever possible.
- All meetings will continue to be held remotely until further notice.

Restricted Visitor Access

Visitors to Residence Halls
Residence Hall visiting rules have been restructured: In all campus residences, access to rooms and living spaces is limited to on-campus residents only, at all times. Overnight guests will not be permitted. This plan may be subject to change as conditions evolve and the University receives further guidance from federal and state health officials.

Wellness Center
The Wellness Center is planning for student-use only in the fall. A detailed operations plan has been drafted and outlines the daily cleaning procedures, and safety protocols for employees and students. Wellness Center staff will continue to offer a blended approach with virtual and in-person programs and services. The virtual classes are open to any member of the WSU community.

Students will not be allowed to sponsor a guest in the Wellness Center or its fitness facilities.

The University anticipates reopening its outside walking track to the community during restricted, posted hours later this summer and into the semester, subject to evolving health and safety concerns.

Campus Events
Current public health guidelines restrict the number of people who can gather in one location for a public event. If current restrictions continue, most public events on campus will be prohibited in the fall.

Limit non-essential travel
In light of health and safety concerns, and to aid with cost containment, the University has suspended all travel, both in- and out-of-state through the academic year, 2020-2021. This includes the suspension of all international travel, including planned study abroad programming.
There will be very limited exceptions made to meet University operating requirements. Exceptions require preparation of a detailed travel plan subject to review by the administration to determine if it is appropriate and necessary.

**Shuttle to Goddard Lot and Sagamore Road Studios**

The University is developing, with its transportation contractor, a plan for shuttle use during the fall semester. This may include the addition of shuttles to adhere to social distancing guidelines. A final plan and schedule will be in place by August.

**Limited Access to Communal Social Spaces**

To comply with social distancing guidelines, all shared communal spaces on campus will be closed or have reduced density. Use of pool tables, gaming consoles, and other areas within the residence halls and Student Center will likely not be available for use in the fall. Gatherings in lounges and other informal spaces may be limited to no more than 10 people, and some even less, based on square footage. Signs will be posted at the entrance of each communal space and it will be expected that students maintain physical distancing at all times and wear a face covering over the nose, mouth, and chin. Furniture will be marked to identify where people can sit to comply with social distancing guidelines.

Additionally, conference rooms not otherwise converted to instructional space will either be closed to use or be restricted to meet social distancing guidelines. All such spaces will be signed with applicable limitations.

**Mandatory Training and Compliance**

Human Resources will provide instructions for mandatory training on health and safety, and new campus protocols before employees return to campus. Training will be personalized to include our student leaders and human resources personnel reviewing content and/or narrating material. Essential health and safety content will include:

- Face coverings
- Frequent handwashing and sanitizing
- Social distancing/elevator occupancy
- Safe Return to Campus website for reference
- Campus cleaning protocols
- What to do if you get sick
- Upon Return to Campus – what to do
- Importance of mutual shared responsibility
Other Safe Campus Subcommittee Reports

Recruitment

The University has continued to recruit and admit qualified students for the fall 2020 semester with an enhanced set of services and support systems, and with the usual admissions cycle has also begun its annual transition to recruiting the next classes for spring 2021 and fall 2021.

Summarized below are key elements of the University’s recruitment focus going forward:

- **“Meet a WSU Faculty Member” Meetings:** Worcester State faculty members provide virtual meetings for accepted students to learn more about academic life. Faculty share insights into what classes are like, how students can be successful and how they pursue their academic interests.

- **Virtual Financial Aid Information Sessions:** The financial aid office hosts virtual financial aid information sessions for accepted students and maintains daily financial aid office hours for accepted students.

- **Virtual Multicultural Student Information Session:** The Admissions Office and the Office of Multicultural Affairs host ALANA accepted student events to celebrate and showcase our diverse student population and how our community supports its diverse student population.

- **Virtual Transfer Events:** The Admissions Transfer Center offers virtual office hours, virtual transfer decision days, and virtual transfer admissions sessions for prospective transfer students.

- **Virtual Faculty Office Hours – “Chat With a WSU Faculty Member”:** The “Chat With a WSU Faculty Member” virtual office hours will be offered to all new incoming students to connect with a WSU faculty member via a ZOOM conference call. These virtual office hours are intended to replicate in-person office hours that faculty make available to students.

- **Summer 2020 New Student “Gatherings” at Alumni Homes:** The Admissions Office and Alumni Office will offer “Summer 2020 New Student Gatherings” using our network of alumni to host gatherings at their homes. With the cancellation of Congratulations Day and in-person, on-campus June orientation days, many new incoming students have missed out the opportunity to meet each other in an informal, in-person setting. These alumni-hosted gatherings will help to facilitate new students meeting in person, form connections with classmates, generate excitement over attending WSU, and engage alumni. These events aim to support our new student enrollment and mitigate summer melt.
For accepted students and potential applicants for fall 2020, questions about these and other Admissions services, please consult our COVID19 Admissions Website.
https://www.worcester.edu/Undergraduate-Admissions/COVID-19-Updates/.

For prospective future students, post-fall 2020, the University has a set of planned activities and services beginning this summer. Those include:

- **Drive-Thru Campus Tour:** Drive-thru campus tours will provide an alternative to on-campus, student-led tours. Two drive-thru options will be available. Option 1 includes a mapped tour route with information stops. Signs will be created to help students and families navigate the tour from their cars and a script/audio narration will be developed for them to follow along. Option 2 incorporates the use of staff and students on-campus. Students and families can register in advance for a tour time and be greeted by an admissions counselor or student tour guide. Families will be checked in, provided with admission materials, have questions answered, and receive assistance navigating the tour. Access to buildings may be available on a limited basis. Refreshments or a giveaway will be provided.

- **Virtual Campus Tour:** A more robust and realistic online virtual tour, which will be accessible via the Worcester State website. The online virtual tour will replicate a more traditional campus tour and provide prospective students with 360-degree photography of the outside and inside of buildings along with video and audio content. The virtual tour will be connected to the admissions CRM so that prospective student information can be captured.
Retention

The Retention Sub-group of the Fall 2020 Safe Return Team was charged to consider options to support the retention of all eligible WSU Spring 2020 students to Fall 2020.

One recommendation included a return to fall classes with multiple flexible delivery options, including:

- face-to-face instruction while keeping faculty, staff, and students safe
- the earliest possible announcement of the fall opening decision
- flexibility in allowing students to select classes properly identified in WebAdvisor based on their modality,
- and as much consistency in remote instruction across courses as possible.

Students’ technology needs were identified as numerous and likely to affect retention. The sub-group recommended that the University seek additional laptops and internet hotspots for future students in need (both available through the Emergency Fund). Additionally, students should be allowed on-campus in pre-determined spaces, outdoor spaces, and their personal vehicles to utilize the on-campus wireless internet signal.

Communications

Providing timely and accurate information concerning Worcester State University’s fall 2020 Safe Return to Campus is the responsibility of the Office of Communications and Marketing (MARCOM). MARCOM created a short-term COVID-19 communication plan (March through May) that included a dedicated COVID-19 website, and is working on a long-term Safe Return to Campus strategic communications plan that started in May and continues to the present. The Safe Return to Campus plan included a dedicated website. Articulating the plan via email, website, press release, photo opportunity, social media and other means is currently in process.

Elements of both plans included:

- MARCOM’s coordination with each Safe Return to Campus team to disseminate their content broadly across multiple mediums.
- Sharing information and news articles on social media each week which allows for robust sharing and increase traffic to WSU’s website.
- Telling more stories about our community through stories posted on the WSU News feed.
- Development of press releases from specific news articles.
- Increase of development of pandemic resiliency stories featuring Worcester State’s students, faculty, staff and alumni.
- Posting updates to the Safe Return to Campus website on social media platforms.
• Posting relevant updates related to changes in public health or state guidelines as it relates to WSU’s plans.

The Communications subgroup reviewed several topics and suggestions for awareness including the use of video content, increased distribution of student-written stories from The New Worcester Spy, podcasts, faculty, student, alumni and donor stories, that promote COVID-19 resiliency, and how the student emergency fund is helping all students that are in need.

**External Relations**

External Relations links WSU to external organizations providing COVID-19-related support including:

- *Worcester Together*, a collaboration of the United Way of Central Mass, the City of Worcester and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. Through this connection WSU is represented on the Worcester Together Accountability Subcommittee which will provide accountability for all 78 organizations that were signatories to the Worcester Together statement.
- Developed and implemented a survey of faculty and staff to gauge interest and expertise in volunteer capacities.
- Facilitating learning opportunities for WSU students who are willing and able to provide support to various volunteer organizations.
- Generate financial support for WSU students through donations to and through which students can apply for a grant from the Student Emergency Fund. To donate: alumni.worcester.edu/se; to apply for funds: [https://www.worcester.edu/Student-Emergency-Fund/](https://www.worcester.edu/Student-Emergency-Fund/)