

Fall 2020 Academic Plan Review

In May of 2020, the Fall Academic Planning Group presented its report for fall 2020 academic instruction. University leadership recommended a hybrid model of instruction with 80% of classes being offered online and approximately 20% to be offered face-to-face on campus. Since then, the situation has changed. The COVID –19 rate of infection and spread are increasing substantially in the ensuing months; the ICS team reconsidered the recommendation and revised its recommendation for fall 2020.

This plan does not cover the full implications for housing students on campus. ESS is developing a plan for the fall 2020 quarter, which is presently in the formal approval process. They will review the housing plan based on the outcome of this recommendation.

Incident management objectives

The ICS was streamlined in June of 2020 to retain the benefits of the incident command structure yet reflect the desire to shift operational decisions to the respective divisional authority. To do that, the incident management team defined six objectives for managing the Western COVID-19 situation:

1. Ensure effective planning and operations for academic year 20/21 in response to the COVID pandemic
2. Help maintain the health and safety of faculty, students, staff, and others
3. Develop plans to respond to potential scenarios and ensure the development of appropriate risk mitigation plans
4. Optimize and use resources as efficiently as possible
5. Track COVID-19 related budget expenditures
6. Ensure coordination and communications are intentional

The paramount objective is to maintain the health and safety of Western people to the degree possible. This means that if the appropriate risk mitigation strategies are not implemented, we should not make decisions that unnecessarily endanger people. Western will do its best to mitigate the spread of any cases on campus; however, Western will experience COVID-19 cases in fall 2020 if it opens beyond minimal operations.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says you are at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 if you are aged 65 years and older and if you live in a nursing home or long-term care facility or have underlying medical conditions.

Guiding principles

The incident management team operates with two guiding principles in mind:

- We act in the interests of the broader community as well as of Western in our prevention and response
- Our communications emphasize our rejection of stigma and bias

Western's role as a leader in the community and its impact on the economic environment should not be understated. Organizations such as Whatcom's County Health Department are waiting on Western to

take the lead and make our operating decisions without absolute direction. Also, the decisions that Western makes has a significant impact on the community. If the guiding principle is about acting in the interests of the broader community, do the health risks of bringing more people into Bellingham outweigh the economic risks of not doing so?

Absolute condition

In the planning group's report, the group determined a set of conditions that would affect Western's ability to deliver some on-campus instruction in the fall. To do this, the group defined the "absolute condition" - as the pandemic-state at the time of the fall quarter. The report stated that only under relatively benign conditions—a declining rate of infections and deaths in the nation, the state of Washington, and Whatcom County— could they consider face-to-face activity in Fall Quarter. The report goes on to say, "In an increasingly dangerous environment, it likely would be the case that restrictions being eased as of this writing would return, and even if not, the moral imperative of safety that has been our first guiding principle would dictate a continuation of online-only instruction."

The situation as it stands is that conditions are not benign; infections continue to increase in the nation, the state of Washington and Whatcom County. The absolute condition has not been met; the pandemic shows no signs of being benign in the next few months. COVID-19 transmission is not benign. There is increasing evidence of aerosol transmission, something that was not known about in May.

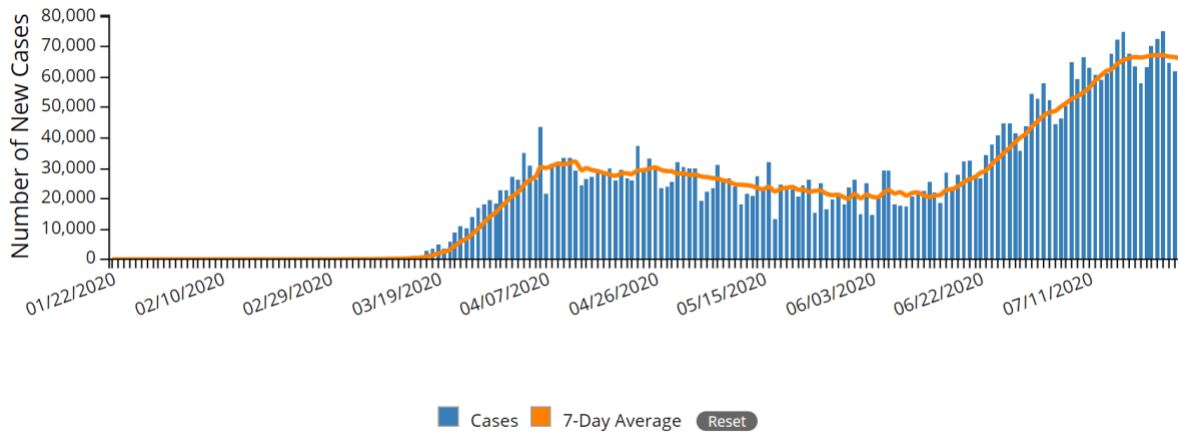
The next few pages show charts with the most recent case counts as of 7/28/20; all indicate that we are still in the first wave of the pandemic. Although the state of the pandemic in Whatcom County is essential, equally important is the state of the pandemic in the communities that are home to Western students, mainly since summer is a time when most students are away from Bellingham and so would be returning from their home communities.

Most Western students come from the I-5 corridor between Olympia and Bellingham—from south to north: Thurston, Pierce, King, Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom counties, for the 2019-20 academic year here are the statistics:

- **87.4%** of students originating **in state** (14,090)
- **33.3%** of in-state students originating in **King County** (4,630)
- **15.2%** of in-state students originating in **Snohomish County** (2,120)
- **12.2%** of in-state students originating in **Whatcom County** (1,701)
- **7.7%** of in-state students originating in **Pierce County** (1,065)

Current case counts for the nation, state and relevant counties

NOTE: National statistics were current as of this report’s date. For more recent information, [visit the CDC’s website](#).



The 7-Day moving average of new cases (current day + 6 preceding days / 7) was calculated to smooth expected variations in daily counts.

Figure 1: **National** case count as of 7/28/20

NOTE: Statistics for Washington state and counties were current as of this report’s date. For more recent data, [visit the Washington State Department of Health’s website](#).

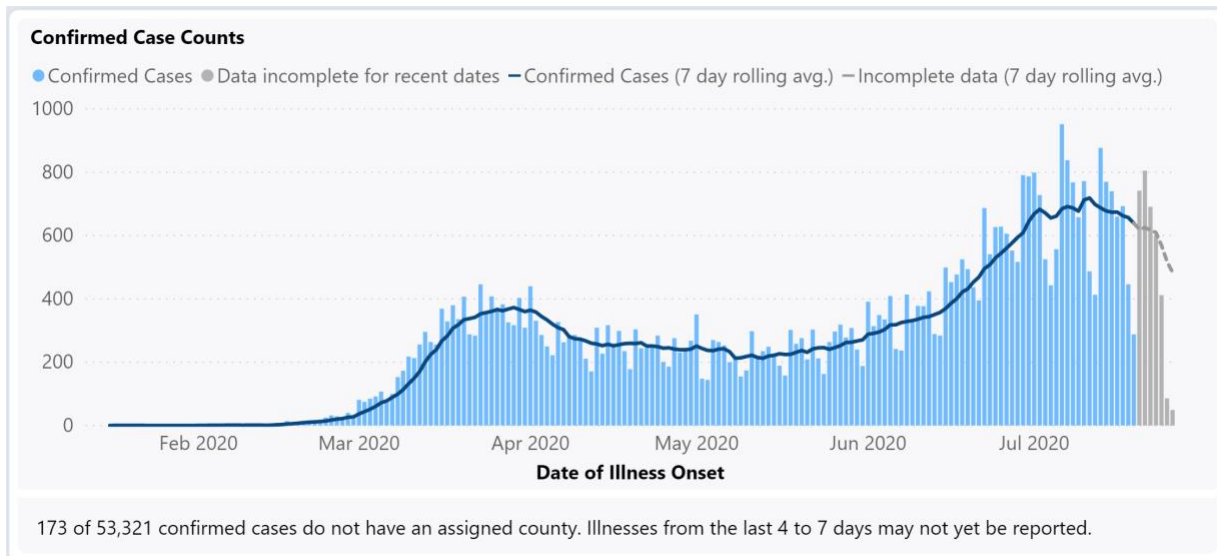


Figure 2: **Confirmed case counts for Washington state**; Washington State DOH 7/26/20

County case data

Note that 173 of 53,321 confirmed cases do not have an assigned county. Illnesses from the last 4 to 7 days may not yet be reported.

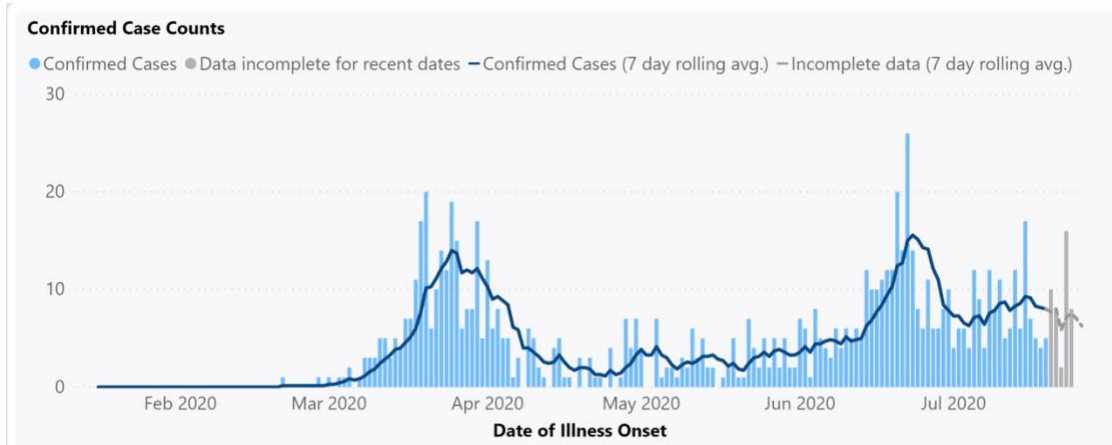


Figure 3: Confirmed case counts for **Whatcom County**; Washington State DOH 7/26/20

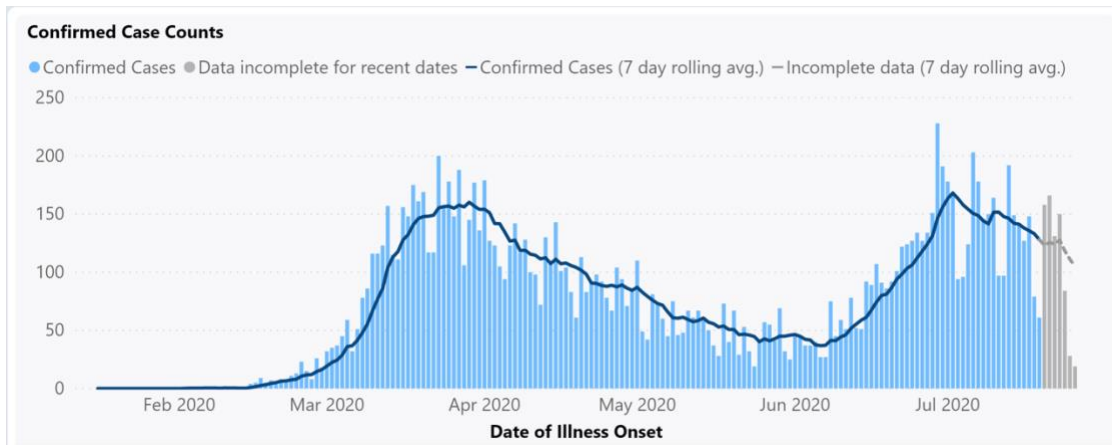


Figure 4: Confirmed cases for **King County**; Washington State DOH 7/26/20

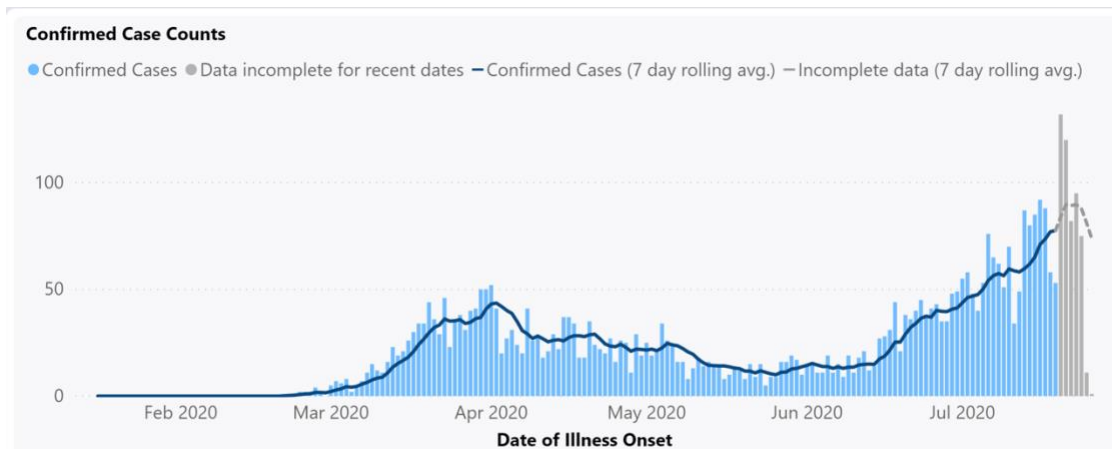


Figure 5: Confirmed cases for **Pierce County**; Washington State DOH 7/26/20

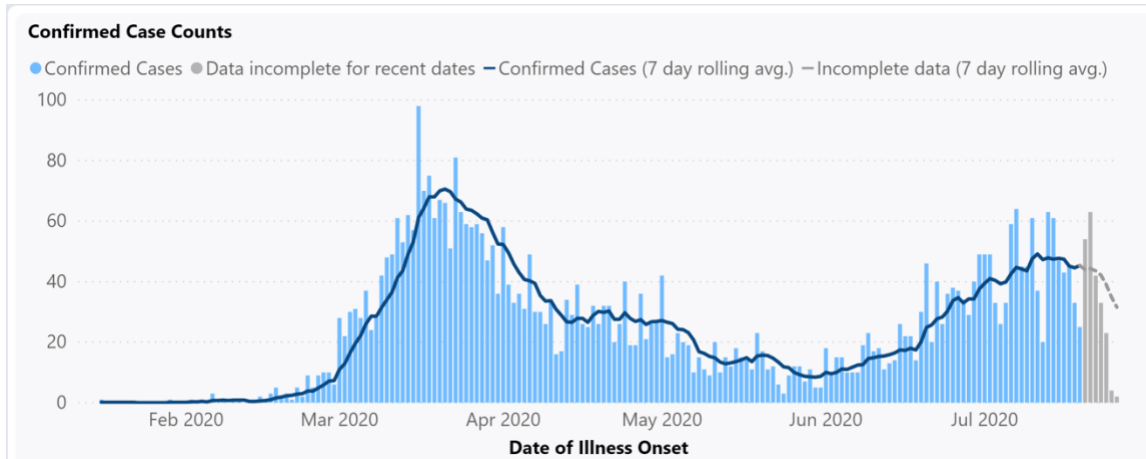


Figure 6: Case count for **Snohomish County**; Washington State DOH 7/26/20

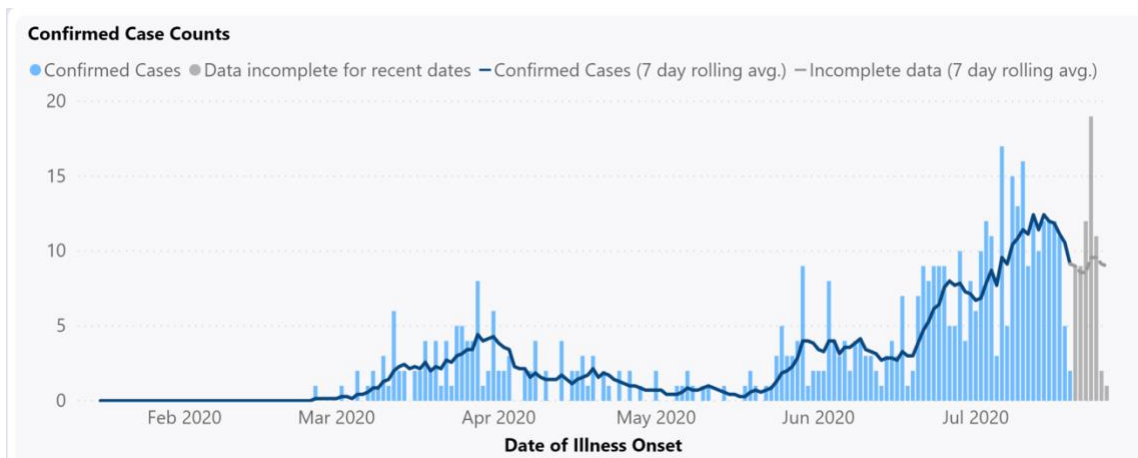


Figure 7: Case count for **Thurston County**; Washington State DOH 7/26/20

Whatcom County progress against the Governor's Phase 2 metrics goals

The state's Risk Assessment Dashboard, reported on just before midnight, Monday July 27, shows Whatcom County meeting only two of five Phase 2 metrics goals:

Whatcom County key metrics - currently in Phase 2

	Value	Goal	Meeting Goal
Rate per 100K of newly diagnosed cases during the prior two weeks	57.7	<25	No
Number of individuals tested for each new case during the prior week	46.2	>50	No
Percent of individuals testing positive for COVID-19 during the past week	2.2%	<2%	No
Percent of licensed beds occupied by patients	76.5%	<80%	Yes
Percent of licensed beds occupied by COVID-19 cases	1.6%	<10%	Yes

NOTE: Statistics for Whatcom County were current as of this report's date. For more recent data see the [Washington State Risk Assessment Dashboard](#).

It should be noted that the number of Phase 2 goals Whatcom County meets has fluctuated almost daily for several weeks.

Planning conditions

The planning group identified five "primary conditions," those that, assuming the absolute condition was met or was foreseen to be met at the start of Fall 2020, needed to be fulfilled for some on-campus instruction to resume for fall quarter and that could guide the nature and extent of that instruction. The group also identified three "secondary conditions." It could be that the decision to provide instruction on campus is made despite the absolute condition not being met. Meeting the conditions, which echo to a great degree the Governor's guidance for higher education, may still allow us to operate at a level of risk that is deemed acceptable by University leadership. If the decision is made to continue with face-to-face instruction, the team will do their best to mitigate spread as; inevitably, cases occur among students, staff, and faculty.

Although Western's Health and Wellness team are confident in their ability to track, test, and trace with the County, there are possible risks such as the availability of supplies that will limit the university's ability to mitigate risk. An analysis of the university's ability to deliver against the planning conditions is shown on the next page.

Planning conditions

Condition	Outlook	Status	Information
Primary conditions			
Adequate testing capability, including availability of tests and testing facilities and prompt response times		In development	Western's Health and Wellness department predicts that we will have the capacity to track (attestation), test and trace by the start of the fall quarter, though circumstances change rapidly. They are working with the health department to keep the lines of communication open and building capacity through our nursing program and county partners.
Adequate numbers of trained contact tracers (contact tracing depends on low numbers)		In development	
Adequate capacity (space and services) for separation (self-isolation or self-quarantine)		Ready	For students living on campus, isolation and quarantine spaces have been allocated. For students living off campus, the health department will take the lead and we will do weekly wellness checks.
Ability to distance according to then-current guidelines		In development	Classrooms will be set up to ease physical distancing; research labs are already in operation with physical distancing.
Capacity and policies for students, staff, and faculty who need to work or study from remote locations		Check status for new students	Capacity and policies were established in Spring 2020

Secondary conditions			
Adequate health-care capacity in Whatcom County		Ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whatcom currently has enough hospital bed capacity for both COVID and non-COVID cases
Adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE)		In review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement indicates that there may be a supply shortage in the fall; may be an issue with nitrile gloves
Adequate cleaning and disinfecting capacity		In review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disinfectant liquids are in very short supply

Triggers to shift to remote teaching

The incident management team developed a list of triggers that could cause a shift in teaching modality, some of which are the conditions listed above. The intent is to have a comprehensive list to help consider when the university would decide to move instruction to a fully online modality. The process is first to determine the ranges in which a trigger could be considered actionable. There is a timing need to

look at what action needs to be triggered and work back from that, i.e., how long it takes to execute a response.

Triggers to assist in decision-making before the quarter starts and during the academic year

	Likelihood	Impact	Status
Primary triggers			
Death of faculty, staff or student due to COVID-19	Unknown	High	Unknown
More restrictive directives from the Governor or County Health	High	High	Phase II restrictions have increased
Directive from County Health that WWU follow the Phases	Low	Medium	Unknown
Inadequate testing for staff, students and faculty	Low	High	In planning
Inadequate numbers of trained contact tracers/ inability to contact trace positive test results	Medium	High	Plans in place
Inadequate facilities for isolation and quarantine, including self-isolation	Low	High	Plans in place
More restrictive guidance from the CDC or other federal agency	Low	High	Unknown
Secondary triggers			
Number of cases amongst vulnerable people	High	Medium	Unknown
Case in another local university or business	High	Medium	Already occurred
Faculty/staff sentiment about operating	High	High	Already a concern
Action by comparable universities	High	Low	Unknown
Super spreader events, particularly on or near campus, e.g. large social gatherings, protests without distancing	Medium	High	Unknown
Public schools are closed	Medium	Medium	Unknown
Availability of childcare/eldercare	Medium	Medium	Unknown

Additional triggers to assist in decision-making after the quarter starts

The following triggers, once agreed, need to be quantified to identify an acceptable range.

Trigger	Status
Numbers of positive cases on campus	Determine acceptable range and/or trend line
Outbreak in a dormitory	“
Number of quarantined/isolated students: 50% capacity of res hall spaces; growth per day (need to look at both variables)	“
Insufficient students follow behavioral guidance, on or off campus	Work underway on developing mitigating steps; determine acceptable range
Number of quarantined/isolated faculty or staff	Determine acceptable range
Adequate supplies of personal protection equipment	Possible risk area regarding nitrile gloves
Adequate cleaning and disinfecting supplies for teaching and support spaces	Major risk area due to lack of disinfecting supplies

Note that the Governor recently modified the gathering size for Phase III to no more than 10 people. According to the Council of Presidents, this does not apply to higher education. Western would follow the governor's more specific guidance for higher education.

According to the Chronicle for Higher Education¹, about two-thirds of institutions who responded said they were planning for in-person classes as of late May. That figure has declined to just above 50 percent as of July 20; there is still a substantial proportion of the more than 1,200 campus plans reviewed. Many institutions reopening can keep a closed, isolated environment, which Western does not have.

Options

As indicated in the matrix on pages 11 and 12, there are two choices for senior leadership: either continue with the current hybrid model, responding to a potential outbreak if/when it happens; or shift to an online modality, with minimal operations and avoiding a potential outbreak.

Modified academic operations (current plan)

The current plan is to open with modified academic operations: a hybrid delivery of coursework with 20% of courses offering some campus components, and instruction will be fully online after Thanksgiving. The housing plans are for up to 2,800 residents. This is a risk mitigation option.

The analysis, coupled with the information in this document, indicates that the current plan holds relatively more risk than a fully online modality. The current plan puts Western in a reactive mode, responding to an outbreak if it occurs. The ICS team has reviewed their analysis with Paul Mueller in Risk Management, who concurs with the approach and the conclusions.

However, if the university chooses to continue with face-to-face instruction, the ICS will continue to follow the federal, state, and local guidelines to manage the situation to the best of our ability. In following this option, university leadership will have to accept the elevated level of risk involved.

Minimal academic operations

In minimal academic operations, all classes are online, with limited exceptions. University Residences is expected to operate at a reduced occupancy (number to be determined) based on the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and the American College Health Association, with minimal academic operations similar to summer 2020 operations. This is a risk-avoidance option.

In full-remote academic operations, all classes are online, with the option to transition to in-person if conditions improve.

Research operations may continue if departments abide by safety guidelines followed in the summer. The only classes allowed would be a) experiential and b) those that can be delivered safely.

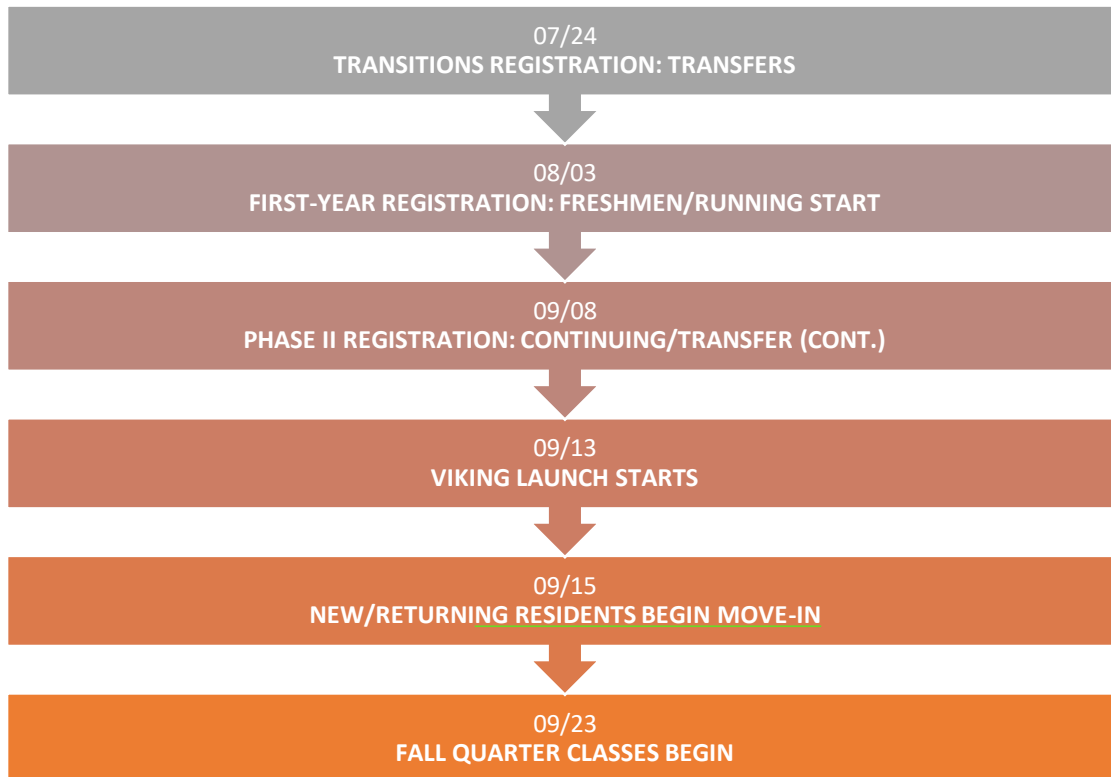
Recommendation

The working group's recommendation is that Western move to minimal academic operations (all online classes with a few exceptions) for fall 2020. Those exceptions include experiential courses that can be taught safely. It also includes research work. This recommendation does not apply to the winter or spring quarter in 2021, as we will need to continue to monitor the state of the pandemic. The university should be guided by the science and by our primary objective: Help maintain the health and safety of faculty, students, staff, and others.

There are severe financial implications with this decision, as well as implications for student housing. It is assumed that University Residence's operations would be drastically reduced, thus avoiding the potential risk involved in having many students in close quarters.

Timeline

The ICS team is very conscious that students have and will make decisions based on the instruction modality. Monday, August 3, is when first-year registration starts and represents a critical date.



Planning options

	MODIFIED ACADEMIC OPERATIONS (CURRENT PLAN)		MINIMAL ACADEMIC OPERATIONS	
	Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
Academic	*Delivery effectiveness of certain courses may be increased by campus activities	*Many faculty are not comfortable with the risks of infection posed by in-person instruction at this time	*Will allow faculty to plan and prepare for quality remote instruction *Will address faculty concerns about risks posed by in-person instruction	*Delivery effectiveness of certain courses may be decreased through remote instruction
Community	*Support of local economy - increased number of students on campus and living in the area will increase support of landlords and businesses (may be minimal: large rentals currently at 75% capacity)	*Potentially contribute to community outbreak *Use of critical pandemic resources (masks, tests, etc.) *Western is expected to be responsible for its students, even those who live off campus	*Demonstrate leadership role and responsibility for students *Protect community health and pandemic resources	*Impact to local economy - decreased number of students on campus and living in the area will reduce support of landlords and businesses (may be minimal: large rentals currently at 75% capacity)
Enrollment	*Reassure students seeking on-campus experience *Potentially maximize enrollment - polling indicates first-time students are less likely to enroll for on-line only courses (4-year cumulative impact)	*May not be able to meet all student expectations for safety *Potential impacts on winter enrollment of mid-quarter shutdown	*Reassure students concerned about safety	*Disappoint students seeking on-campus experience *Potential drop in enrollment due to remote instruction
Employees	*Potentially address challenges with remote work *Alleviate challenges some employees are experiencing by allowing limited return to campus	*Risk health and safety of employees *High likelihood of changing expectations mid-quarter	*Protect health and safety of employees *Provide clear, reliable expectations	*Potential challenges with continued remote work *Financial impacts may affect Western employees if reductions in workforce become necessary. This could lead to the loss of experienced and trained employees

Key:

Significant Benefits
Significant Challenges

Modified Campus Operations : Hybrid delivery of coursework with 20% of courses offering some campus components; housing up to 2,800 residents; fully online after Thanksgiving

Minimal Campus Operations: All online courses with limited exceptions; housing less than 500 residents, return to spring quarter operations?

	MODIFIED ACADEMIC OPERATIONS (CURRENT PLAN)		MINIMAL ACADEMIC OPERATIONS	
	Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
Facilities	*No significant impact - building maintenance will remain relatively constant *Inclement weather response will be simplified	*Increased demand for cleaning services despite limited resources	*Buildings can be locked continuously - security and cleaning requirements more predictable	*Lower occupancy means fewer eyes to detect failures in aging buildings and infrastructure
Financial	*Less initial adverse impact on self-sustaining budgets	*Potential impacts on self-sustaining budgets of mid-quarter shutdown	*Avoid likely fees/housing refunds	*Significant impacts on self-sustaining revenues, esp. for University Residences *Potential multi-year impact on net tuition depending on decrease in enrollment
Housing	*Up to 2800 residents plus visitors, maximizing housing revenue and residential experience for students	*Very difficult to manage student behavior to limit spread of disease *Most significant source of risk for an outbreak on campus and potential spread to staff	*Greatly reduces issues with addressing student behavior on campus, if non-compliant *Minimize risk for an outbreak on campus and potential spread to staff	*Any reduction in housing occupancy results in a loss of revenue to this self-sustaining operation. The greater the reduction, the greater the loss. May also impact other operations that rely on housing revenue to support their own budgets *Significantly limiting residential experience for students
Legal	*Potentially better satisfy contractual obligations, e.g. retail	*Increased legal liability	*Minimized legal liability	*Potentially some issues with contractual obligations (retail, etc.)
Reputation	*Maintain semblance of "residential college"	*Appearance of prioritizing budget/operations over health, safety, social responsibility	*Demonstrate leadership role *Prioritize health, safety, social responsibility	*Could be seen as misleading approach to enrollment
Safety	*None foreseen	*Risk of significant medical/safety issues, limited resources to support medical/safety needs	*Avoid significant medical/safety issues *EHS advises against modified operations with current classroom and housing plans	*None foreseen

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