Dear Western Community,

I hope that this very unusual fall quarter is nonetheless going well for you, and that you are healthy and finding safe ways to stay connected.

I know that many of you are making plans for Winter Quarter and are anxious to know what instruction and work will look like in the months ahead. Given what we know about current virus numbers and projected trends for winter, and based on the recommendation of the university’s Incident Command Structure (ICS) and the Academic Coordinating Committee of the Faculty Senate, we have decided to move forward with a Winter Quarter with approximately the same levels of face-to-face instruction and campus residency levels as Fall Quarter, with a few small differences detailed below.

The decisions around winter were made using the same sets of conditions, data, processes and recommendations from both on- and off-campus experts that were used to set instruction, residency and campus operating levels for fall. Virus levels locally, in our region, and in our state continue to be our primary guidepost in making these decisions.

Operating Level and Academic Schedule: ICS established an absolute condition in planning for the fall term that the number of cases locally and in our state need to be decreasing before we consider increasing the student presence on campus. And while those numbers are somewhat improved over July, they are not as low as April or May, and consequently Washington’s caseload numbers are rising again. Thus, we have made the decision to maintain Operational Level 2 for Winter Quarter and to keep the same face-to-face class and residency levels, which we feel is the safest and most prudent decision for the campus community. We will continue to monitor all health indicators and adjust the University’s Operating Level as appropriate.

One change is that Winter Quarter will start under a primarily remote schedule on Jan. 5, our originally scheduled start date. However, those classes that are scheduled for face-to-face or hybrid delivery will be held remotely between Jan. 5 and Jan.11, after which they will move to face-to-face or hybrid instruction. This will accommodate for the testing of all students returning to either campus residences and/or face-to-face classes or other on campus presence (e.g. athletics, student employment) after the long holiday break.  We believe that ensuring this testing upon return from remote locations will continue to contribute to the low positivity rate we have currently experienced, which is well below those of our county or other parts of the state. Our primary goal is to identify positive tests early and to isolate/quarantine those affected as quickly as possible upon return to an on-campus presence. More information also will be sent out soon about testing for employees working on campus.

Regarding mandatory student fees, the Finance Committee of the ICS will make a recommendation based on this operating decision to keep the fee structure similar to fall, pending approval by the Board of Trustees at its December 11th meeting. Tuition will also remain the same, but the committee will continue to set aside a portion of tuition proceeds to reduce the cost of attendance for those with financial need. Western will also continue to offer a monthly tuition payment plan so that students can pay tuition in smaller monthly installments.

Student Services Support: Health & Wellness Services will continue to provide medical and mental healthcare for Western’s Bellingham students in winter quarter.  All of our student services offices will continue to be available remotely. Their availability can be found via the Fall Safe Start Guide.   We continue to plan for the safe availability of on-campus activities, such as the Viking Union and the Wade King Student Recreation Center, when virus caseloads fall and guidance changes.

For Western students in Everett and at Western on the Peninsulas, for Winter Quarter we will continue to follow the guidance and protocols established by our university partners at those locations as it relates to access to facilities and modality of instruction.

As I close, I want to extend my sincere thanks to the entire campus community for the work this fall to provide a safe learning and working environment for us all -- from the teams cleaning our classrooms and facilities every day to our dedicated nurses, nurse practitioners, and physicians who rapidly and effectively created and implemented a testing program for our students. Also, I want to offer my deep gratitude to our students who have so wholeheartedly embraced the responsibility each of us has to protect our communities from COVID. You make WWU look good! On behalf of all of our neighborhoods and adjacent communities, I thank you for making smart choices and looking out for one another.

More details, especially about the testing protocols being put in place before students return for the start of Winter Quarter, are to follow. I remain hopeful that 2021 will see a return to a safer and more normal academic environment at Western.

Be well,

Sabah Randhawa

President

The Incident Command System team at Western has established three goals for all of our preparation and response to COVID-19: to protect life safety and minimize the spread of the coronavirus illness, to maintain – as much as possible – the continuity of Western’s operations, and to communicate with our communities as fully as possible.

Western's coronavirus information website features Frequently Asked Questions; has links to campus, regional and national resources; an archive of campus messaging and media stories about coronavirus, and more. The site is a living document, and will get frequent updates as the coronavirus situation evolves.