Compiled University leadership’s response to WUSA’s gathered feedback on the University’s plan to return to on-campus activity

November 4 2021

Consider the availability of study spaces. Will students be able to comfortably use campus facilities to get schoolwork done between classes?
We expect to be able to significantly expand available student study spaces in the lead up to Winter term pending public health guidance. This includes the reopening of group study spaces and study areas and seats in the library. We will also begin working with faculties to replace common area furniture for social/study space in anticipation of physical distancing limits being lifted.

What spaces will be available for students to eat on-campus? Will this also consider the outdoor climate for the winter term and students needing food into the evening?
In late September, the new provincial vaccine screening requirements prompted some necessary changes to our on-campus dining spaces. In SLC, these requirements may begin to lift in January and flexible dining areas should be more feasible then.

Our Safety Office has worked in partnership with public health to develop new “lounge/study spaces” where students may remove masks to eat only. Currently, space is available at STC, DC Bytes area, E5/E7, and in the Arts buildings. Compliance has been an issue in all flexible study spaces. The monitoring efforts from WUSA in the SLC this term have been both effective and greatly appreciated. Ongoing support from WUSA in messaging and compliance will be helpful.

Will students who are unable to return to campus be able to progress in their degrees? (Some options include reshuffling the order of courses, offering some online sections, allowing students to get credit for an in-person course in cases where lecture recordings are made and assignments are done online)?
Since the goal of the University is to return to pre-pandemic levels of in-person instruction for Winter 2022 and subsequent terms, students should prepare to attend in-person classes. In most programs, students may find required courses are only available in person. Also, fewer online courses will be offered than have been available during the pandemic. Those who cannot (or choose not) to return to campus may work with their academic advisors to discuss the best approach to progressing in their specific programs. For most students, this may mean it will take longer to complete their programs, and may involve taking more electives, registering part-time, taking a term away, or finding a course or courses at another University.
Students who do not return to campus in Winter 2022 will need to return eventually, in compliance with vaccine regulations, to complete their programs.

**What considerations will be taken in course design to ensure students do not feel pressure to come to campus if they suspect they may be sick or exposed to COVID-19?**

Since the start of the pandemic, the University has provided guidelines for instructors to develop alternate arrangements for in-person classes, such as:

- a short-term (e.g., one-week) cancellation of in-person classes (for the particular course or University-wide)
- a longer-term cancellation of in-person meetings (for the particular course or University-wide)
- cancellation of in-person (midterm or final) examinations

Instructors are directed to ensure their course plans are consistent with any program, department, or faculty-wide contingency plans in place, and to stay up to date on any modifications to these plans as public health guidance evolves. Instructors are also advised to provide as much detail as possible in their plans to make students aware of these possible scenarios, and to detail what accommodations are available for those who cannot attend classes due to self-isolation.

**How will you communicate expectations around use of campus for non-course activities, such as independent studying, collaborative work, and physical activity?**

Currently, all group study spaces are closed on campus. How will instructors be directed to assign group projects?

Group study spaces are expected to reopen wherever possible as public health guidance allows. Instructors are being kept informed about any changes through direct communication and are asked to take this into account as they design all aspects of their courses. This includes group work, but also when deciding on what assessments to use in the courses. Faculties will help to link faculty group study/workspace with course needs.

**How will the vaccine mandate be enforced? If personnel will be on-campus, how will they be trained? (Especially considering continuing concerns around policing and its impacts especially on racialized students, how will we ensure that staff tasked with enforcement do not over police already marginalized students?)**

Anyone accessing campus is required to participate in the campus screening. UW Special Constable Services are not involved in administering the proof of vaccination program. Our data validation program will highlight any inaccuracies or problems with individual submissions or compliance and any student who is found not to be compliant with the
program should expect contact from the Registrar’s Office or a relevant associate dean for further investigation and case management.

**Are classrooms equipped with the technology required to record and/or stream class content? What staff are being hired to support instructors with the technological components of instruction?**

In 2021, the University made a substantial investment into online learning technology. This involved increasing the number of centrally controlled classrooms equipped for streaming from four to 17, with a few additional classrooms within individual faculties. Due to a worldwide shortage of this equipment and the expert technicians required for installation, some equipment has yet to arrive or be installed.

The central Instructional Technology and Media Services (ITMS) unit has provided equipment training to faculty employees, who then trained instructors. ITMS also partnered with the Centre for Teaching Excellence to create instructional videos about streaming and recording of lectures; and in some faculties, additional teaching assistants were hired to support online students through in-class discussions, etc.

**What steps will be taken to ensure that on-campus internet (Eduroam) will be reliable when the load of connected devices greatly increases? How are current concerns around the delayed receipt of the Campus Check-In being addressed?**

Information Systems & Technology (IST) started a complete refresh of the University’s entire Wi-Fi environment in 2020. This major initiative, costing approximately $4 million, includes work in all campus buildings, the Federated and Affiliated Institutions of Waterloo, and all student residences, and involves:

- replacing approximately 5,000 wireless access points across campus (~75% complete)
- replacing the central Wi-Fi controllers
- adding a new authentication and authorization platform and management platform
- working continually outside regular working hours to minimize disruptions in service

The new Wi-Fi environment was selected through RFP and is provided by one of the world’s two leading Wi-Fi vendors. While there have been several major Wi-Fi service disruptions, we believe all user-visible issues are now resolved. If students encounter problems with the University’s Wi-Fi service, please complete the **Wi-Fi Service Report** so the matter can be investigated.
Considering the ever-shifting regulatory landscape, what alternate plans exist to facilitate any necessary “pivots” to more limited capacities and/or greater remote options?

In their planning for the resumption of campus operations, the Return to Campus Task Force and the Return to Campus Resource Group have also included contingency plans for safe and rapid modification or scale-back of activities. As we have throughout the pandemic, will continue to respond based on provincial guidance and the ongoing advisement of public health.