

Stratford University Administration
July 6, 2020
Subject: Campus Reopening Plan

Greetings Stratford Students, Faculty and Staff,

This has been an extraordinary and unprecedented year for all of us and we have been tested and challenged in ways never imagined. We have survived and thrived in this temporary academic delivery model and we are continually amazed and proud at how well you have adapted in learning and working in the remote environment.

Now that we are mid-way through Term 3 2020 it is time to begin the next big challenge: laying the foundation for a safe return to our campuses in August 2020. We know that many students benefit from being on campus, interacting in the classroom, and having an opportunity to engage in person with faculty and fellow students. But we also understand that distance/education and online only courses could be the best fit for some students. Therefore our plan will focus on a hybrid academic delivery model and will include a mix of in-person instruction for programmatic lab courses, hybrid delivery for non-lab classes with the continuation of remote instruction through Zoom and Moodle (8-weeks of the term via Zoom and 2-weeks in-person), and online only course options.

Our guiding principle throughout this process is our commitment to offering the best educational experience for our students while making the safety, health and well-being of the Stratford community our top priority. We must continue to support our mission of preparing students for rewarding careers through quality educational programs that meet the changing needs of employers and our communities. It is our goal to position our students for success.

Reopening our campuses, under proper conditions and with safety modifications, is an essential element of the Stratford experience. To ensure the safe return to our campuses the university established a COVID-19 task force to research and create a protocol plan for campus reopening.

According to CDC the level of risk for COVID-19 transmission increase for institutions of higher learning as follows:

- Lowest Risk: faculty and students engage in a virtual-only instruction/learning
- More Risk: small in-person lectures/labs with individuals remaining at least 6 feet apart and not sharing objects (combination of hybrid and small in-person classes with staggered scheduling)
- Highest Risk: full-sized in-person classes and activities. Students are not spaced apart share classroom resources, etc.

Currently Stratford University is at the lowest risk level as all ground courses are currently being instructed in the remote environment through the use of the LMS platform Moodle and video conference software Zoom. The campus return plan is to move to a hybrid educational delivery model beginning August 2020 to maintain a low-moderate risk level. The institutional task force utilized research and guidance from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the Virginia Department of Health, the Maryland Department of Health and local city health departments to create the Stratford University return to campus protocol plan (to read the full return plan click here: https://www.stratford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SU-Safe-Return-to-Campus-Plan_2020.pdf).

While not all risk can be eliminated, evidence tells us with appropriate precautions it can be greatly reduced and this premise underlines the university reopening approach. When you come to campus it will be a different experience. Expect to wear face coverings as this will be mandatory, physical distancing will be enforced and we want everyone to follow proper personal hygiene protocol. There will be signage throughout the building to reinforce these expectations and there will also be lots and lots of cleaning and sanitizing.

The COVID-19 pandemic is inherently unpredictable, therefore the university leadership team will continue to monitor local, state, and federal directives and adjust the protocol plan to align with any new directives to ensure the continued health, safety and wellness of our students, faculty and staff. We are working closely with state officials and will comply with all guidance and directives for higher education.

Even as we proceed as planned, the learning environment on our campuses won't be exactly how we remember. Flexibility remains crucial in this period of uncertainty. But we are confident in our collective capacity to provide students a rich and rewarding educational experience.

To keep things in perspective...

Balanced and Flexible Approach to Academics

Delivery of rigorous and quality education has always been the center of the Stratford University experience, and that hasn't changed during the recent pandemic. In this new environment, the priority for in-person instruction will be courses that most benefit from face-to-face interactions including our various programmatic laboratory courses and classes that engage in experiential learning in a wide variety of subjects. For non-lab courses the hybrid approach will focus on a mix of synchronous delivery through Zoom and Moodle with a combination of some face-to-face instruction. For these courses, the university will consider a number of factors, including classroom size, space availability and faculty availability for teaching in-person. Online only courses will also be available. Regardless of whether classes are

taught in person, hybrid, or online, we are committed to your success and all instructional and student support needs will be available by appointment at your home-base campus or through the virtual/remote environment.

A Safe and Secure Campus Culture

We are committed to providing a safe environment on all campuses to protect students, faculty and staff. We will reduce the number of students in classrooms to increase the amount of space for physical distancing. We will also practice physical distancing around campus. We have also closed or modified the public common areas on the campuses. This means we will not have any congregating in previously public common areas to include no usage of coffee machines, refrigerators, vending machines or microwaves.

We must be committed to everyone's safety and it is imperative we all respect physical distancing norms. Face coverings will be required for everyone while on campus – this includes walking the halls and in classrooms. While there is so much unknown about this virus, research shows wearing a face covering can greatly reduce the spread of the virus. The university will provide free disposable masks to all students, faculty and staff.

We have hand sanitizing stations readily available throughout the campuses and have enhanced cleaning of public spaces across campus.

Protocol for Monitoring Health Conditions and Protecting Vulnerable Populations

The university will continually monitor and follow all local and state mandates and we have instituted a protocol for responding to individuals that may have been exposed to the virus. Individuals who have had close contact with persons infected with COVID-19 will be required to quarantine, and those who are suspected or have confirmed positive cases must isolate. We ask all students, faculty and staff to practice self-health screenings and to be vigilant about symptoms that may signal sickness. Everyone is expected to stay home if they are sick or believe they have been exposed to the virus.

We know that certain segments of our community are at greater risk because of their age or health status, and we are taking steps to address their concerns. Any employee who is at high risk due to age or medical vulnerability will be encouraged to continue to telework and only be on campus as needed. Students with special vulnerabilities will be provided options to continue their education remotely or to return to campus with additional protections if feasible.

Everyone's Commitment

For the successful reopening of our campuses, we must be vigilant and adapt to the new reality. We ask everyone to be committed to practicing all safety and health protocol. Employees have recently been through training to prepare for the reopening. Students will also be presented training protocol and we ask all Stratford stakeholders to signal their commitment and pledge to follow these new policies for the health and well-being of our community.

We Are Ready to Pivot

Finally, our planning is taking place in real time based on current local and state public health information. We must and will be ready to pivot back to fully remote operations and academic learning during Term 4 or Term 5 2020, if that step becomes necessary to protect the safety of our Stratford community. The current pandemic remains a very fluid situation, which is why we believe the hybrid delivery model for Term 4 and Term 5 is the best way to serve our mission and prioritize safety at the same time.

Everyone's patience, flexibility, cooperation and engaged teamwork will be critical to our ability of offer quality education while simultaneously ensuring safety for all. These are challenging times but together as a Stratford family we will prevail and be a stronger community when this is over.

We appreciate you and your continued support to see Stratford University continue our mission.

Regards,

Dr. Dutchie Reid

Vice President of Academic Affairs

Stratford University