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**Williams College Message from President Maud S. Mandel**

1 message

**Vice President for College Relations** <college-relations@williams.edu>

Wed, Mar 11, 2020 at 3:35 PM

Reply-To: college-relations@williams.edu

To: kaustin9ap@gmail.com

Dear Williams Alumni,

I write to share President Mandel's campus message from this morning about the steps we are taking to care for our communities in light of COVID-19. I am also sharing information regarding alumni events on and off campus.

In uncertain times, we all lean on many communities. We hope your Williams network can be a place to find support and continuity. These crucial life-long connections make it all the more difficult for us to decide to *cancel all on and off campus alumni gatherings until further notice*. At this point, we cannot share an exact date when alumni gatherings will resume. Reunion Weekend is currently scheduled for June 11-14 and we have not yet made a decision about whether it will be held.

Many volunteers and staff have put in substantial time organizing experiences for alumni to connect in person. Canceling events in no way diminishes the importance of that work-- rather it highlights the abiding value of the Williams alumni community.

The [alumni directory](#) is an important resource for staying connected digitally even if you can't be physically together at this time.

As President Mandel says in the conclusion of her message: "A community can take many forms. We are about to confirm—if reluctantly and for unwelcome reasons—that Williams is more than a campus. Williams is all of us. And we will find ways to connect and thrive and celebrate our connections despite even these most unprecedented challenges." Many have already asked how they can best support students through this change to their semester. In addition to the connection Ephs have with one another, the college is relying on unrestricted financial support from alumni and families through the Alumni and Parents Funds in order to provide a pathway forward for students, covering the costs of travel, storage and/or shipping, for example.

You are part of Williams, and Williams is part of you -- and for a lifetime, not just the years you spent as a student. I hope that whatever situations you may face in your own

community, whether related to COVID-19 or not, you know that you will always be part of Williams and we will always be there for you.

Sincerely,

Megan Morey

Vice President of College Relations

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Williams students, faculty and staff,

I came to Williams 18 months ago, with great enthusiasm, to lead the college forward. I now find myself in the unenviable position of pausing that momentum. I am writing with deep regret to inform you that Williams College will end in-person classes on Friday, March 13, and dismiss students for spring break on Saturday, March 14, a week earlier than planned. We will be moving to remote learning beginning on Monday, April 6.

This decision is among the hardest I've ever made. My heart goes out to everyone, and especially seniors, for whom this is the last semester on campus. In this letter I want to tell you why I've made the decision and try to anticipate many of your questions about logistics and impact. Let me begin, however, by acknowledging how disruptive and difficult this is. I'm truly sorry.

Students should assume that they will not be able to return this semester, and should pack accordingly. We will certainly be in contact if the outlook improves, but please plan to complete the term remotely for now.

This decision does several important things:

1. **It reduces the risk of contagion.** Public health experts and medical professionals advise us that the virus will likely reach campus soon. There have been 92 cases in Massachusetts to date, and five within just a few miles of campus. A densely-packed campus is ripe for contagion.
2. **It avoids a false sense of security.** Given the shortage of medical providers and quarantine options in our region, we cannot promise adequate care to the full student body, given the increased demands on the system. Even if you do not contract COVID-19, any type of medical care will be hard to obtain, given increased pressure on resources. A reduced college population will dramatically reduce pressure on local caregivers, and will not take up so-called "surge space" in local hospitals, allowing them to instead focus on vulnerable populations.
3. **It protects those who are most vulnerable.** If COVID-19 moves into the student

population, it will dramatically increase the risk to those who are most vulnerable, including those over seventy and those with compromised immune systems. A healthy person could reasonably choose to stay and accept the personal risk of catching COVID-19, but the decision would unacceptably increase the chance of contagion for others.

4. **It eliminates the change of a more dramatic and problematic disruption later.** If we continued the term for now and then had an outbreak, we would have to cancel the semester suddenly, without continuity options and possibly without credit.
5. **It enables students to get home while options still exist.** Reports suggest that airlines may soon start paring back their schedules. Encouraging students to leave now ensures that people can get home in a timely and safe manner.

Even with all of these considerations, it was a heart-breaking decision.

**Students**, many of you and your families implored me not to make any changes. People understandably worry about academic or creative work being disrupted, division championships or campus activities missed, or potential memories of spring semester lost. I recognize this cost. The fact that I nonetheless made such a decision reflects my level of concern about our situation.

**Faculty**, I know the move is in tension with your passion for teaching, and will require huge changes in your plans. I am very sorry for the huge disruption this will cause. We are going to provide every resource we can to help you transition to remote teaching, and Denise Buell will send a follow-up message about how to access support for online options, videotaping lectures, advice on creating additional assignments, etc.

**Staff**, this affects you deeply, as fellow educators and, with faculty, as local residents. We appreciate your commitment to the students and ask you to please report to work as always so that we can manage the transition well. Williams will still operate, and you will be paid as usual. Anyone with the ability to telecommute or work remotely is welcome to request permission from their manager or Human Resources. Employees who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 should stay home if possible, and can contact the Human Resources team for confidential assistance with arrangements.

**Alumni**, while this decision doesn't directly affect most of you, I appreciate your care for campus. This is a moment for all of us to pull together: if you would like to help, feel free to send ideas to Director of Alumni Relations Brooks Foehl '88 and his team at [alumni.relations@williams.edu](mailto:alumni.relations@williams.edu).

The change will also be complicated, so we want to do everything possible to facilitate it. While there many details to work through, here are critical facts. You will find many more

granular details in an FAQ on the [college's coronavirus site](#).

1. **In-person classes** will be offered on campus as usual through this Friday, March 13.
2. **Spring recess will begin a week earlier than scheduled, on Saturday, March 14. Students will be required to leave campus by no later than Tuesday, March 17 at 5 P.M., unless they have received permission to remain.** Students can depart at any time during that window, but with airlines adjusting schedules we recommend booking or rebooking for the earliest possible departure. To reduce the chance of contagion, students will not be allowed to return to campus once they leave, until the closure is lifted.
3. **You must pack your room before departing**, since it is possible that the semester will be completed remotely. The Office of Student Life will provide boxes and packing materials, and will guarantee storage and, as necessary, shipping for everyone.
4. **Williams is prepared to support students who need to remain on campus because of extenuating circumstances.** If you need to stay, [fill out this request form](#) by 5:00 p.m., on Thursday, March 12. Only students whose requests have been approved will be allowed on campus after March 17. Please know that campus services will be sharply curtailed: for example, facilities may have limited hours or be closed (e.g., Goodrich), meal options will be reduced, while maintaining meal plans, and guests will not be allowed in dorms.
5. **Alternate modes of instruction** will be offered to all students starting Monday, April 6 until further notice. Details will be provided in a follow-up communication. To avoid complications, please assume that the closure will continue through the end of the semester, while knowing that we will be in touch toward the end of spring break with more definite information.
6. **We are ending spring athletics, both practices and competition, beginning Saturday, March 14.** The NESCAC presidents have met and unanimously concluded that conference competition, including championships, will be cancelled for the 2020 spring season.
7. **All college domestic travel is prohibited until further notice, as of March 20.** This is in addition to the existing prohibition on international travel, and excludes travel necessary for students to leave campus.
8. **Resources are available as people begin making these major adjustments.** Our doors are open, and many offices are ready and willing to help, including the [Dean of the College](#), [the Chaplain's Office](#), [the Davis Center](#), [Integrative Wellbeing](#)

Services, the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Office of Special Academic Programs, and the Office of Accessible Education, among others.

Again, check the FAQ on the college's coronavirus site for answers to some of the many questions we expect you to have. We will update the site frequently.

I made this decision after intensive discussions and careful reflection. More than 70 schools around the country had already announced versions of such a move, ranging from Harvard, Stanford, and Amherst to Ohio State and San Francisco State. In making the decision for Williams I considered our particular location and the challenges to guaranteeing people's health. I reflected on the emotional as well as operational impact, and also the considerable financial costs. I thought about the huge effect the change would have on our campus. But I concluded that the risks on campus and in the surrounding area were too great.

This is not how any of us wanted the semester to unfold. Fortunately, a community can take many forms. We are about to confirm—if reluctantly and for unwelcome reasons—that Williams is more than a campus. Williams is all of us. And we will find ways to connect and thrive and celebrate our connections despite even these most unprecedented challenges.

Maud

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