Dear Falcons,

Hopefully you are having a relaxing and restorative summer. We have all had a challenging 15 months. You have impressed me with your resilience and commitment to pursuing a UW-River Falls education, while taking care of yourselves and each other. Your efforts to help us mitigate the risks of COVID-19 on our campus and in our communities over the past year and three months have made a tremendous difference.

A safer traditional fall

As announced, we are planning for a traditional fall semester. We are looking forward to seeing thousands of you move back into our residence halls, gather on the campus mall for our Week of Welcome events, and bring life and vibrancy back to UW-River Falls.

We are not requiring mandatory vaccinations, however we are strongly encouraging students and employees to get vaccinated. That said, we want to also reassure you that our campus pandemic operations team remains vigilant, monitoring infection and vaccination rates and staying closely connected to the local public health offices. We know that pandemic data is showing reassuring trends, but COVID-19 is not gone. We also acknowledge that some of you are at greater risk, or maybe have high risk individuals in your household or immediate family. If you have personal concerns about safety risks, please email Ability Services at ability.services@uwrf.edu or Student Health Services at student.health.services@uwrf.edu. We will do what we can to support you.

70% vaccination rate goal

We know that medical and public health experts are placing a high priority on communities reaching large scale vaccination rates in order to effectively stop the spread of COVID-19 and its variants. Although nearly 50% of residents in the areas immediately surrounding River Falls have been vaccinated, many counties in the Twin Cities metro area are near or over 70% vaccinated.

Experts estimate that in order to safely resume a pre-pandemic lifestyle, we will need at least 70% of the population to be immune to SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Along with the federal government, many states and several campuses in the UW-System, UW-River Falls will therefore be setting a 70% vaccination rate goal for our campus community.

Stay tuned for more information on campus vaccination clinics that will be held at the start of the semester, as well as some fun opportunities to get rewarded for doing your part to keep UW-River Falls safe and fully operational. Use this vaccine finder if you are looking for a place to get vaccinated now. If you are vaccinated, let us know so that we can exempt you from any required testing: select “Vaccinations” in the COVID-19 portal then provide information about your COVID-19 vaccination, including vaccination dates and a photo or scan of your vaccination card. Any information you provide will be kept confidential.

If you are hesitant about the COVID-19 vaccine, please know experts consider them some of the safest and most effective in the world, and any discomfort or minor risks associated with the vaccine are greatly outweighed by the risks of actually getting COVID-19.

If you choose not to get vaccinated, please know that we will respect every individual’s choice. Whether for medical, religious, or personal reasons, if you are choosing not to get vaccinated, we will do what we
can to ensure a safe campus experience for you, including promotion of a culture that is accepting of optional mask wearing. This fall, in fact, use of face coverings will not be required but will remain encouraged in appropriate circumstances. We ask every member of the UW-River Falls community to respect individual decisions and freedoms in this sense.

Other ways to stay safe

As we prepare to return to campus, we will be asking that everyone please continue to:

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Wear a mask if you wish and be supportive of others who may choose to do so.
- Continue good hygiene, such as frequent hand washing or disinfecting.
- Please get a COVID-19 test if you are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms and follow the current public health guidance regarding isolation and quarantine protocols.

If you are feeling stress and anxiety about any of this, please know that we support you. Contact Student Health and Counseling (715-425-3884 or counseling.services@uwrf.edu) or utilize the Silvercloud wellness resources which offer online mental health programs for anxiety, depression, stress, insomnia and resilience.