November 14, 2020

Dear UW-River Falls Campus Community,

Over the past 24 hours two important pieces of information have impacted our decision regarding our return to campus after Thanksgiving Break:

1. Hospitals in our region – including in the Twin Cities metro area and Eau Claire area are at or nearing ICU bed capacity.
2. Cases of COVID-19 in the state of Wisconsin and in our region are at a critically high level and growing. All signs point to continued growth, not decline, of those numbers.

Based on these important facts and after consultation with and support from UW System President Tommy Thompson, the Chancellor’s Cabinet and shared governance leaders, and in line with Governor Tony Evers Executive Order #94, issued Tuesday night, encouraging everyone in Wisconsin to stay home, avoid gatherings and limit travel, we have now deemed it most prudent to avoid returning to in-person classroom settings after the Thanksgiving Break. **All courses will be delivered in remote format beginning November 30 and for the remaining three weeks of the semester.**

We know that our campus academic spaces are among the safest places to be, and we’re proud of the work of the entire campus and our students for adopting safe practices. We are, however, also acutely aware of impacts the disease is having on our region and throughout our community.

We also know that around 80% of our courses have already shifted to online, planned to shift to online after the break, or have developed an online option. We want to let our faculty and instructors know how much we appreciate their hard work to offer online courses.

President Thompson has encouraged us to work with the chancellors at UW-Eau Claire and UW-Stout to act as a region since we’re all impacted by the capacity of local healthcare providers. We will be releasing a joint press announcement today regarding our decision to move to 100% remote educational delivery.

Please know that this announcement about our campuses switching to remote instruction does not reflect a significant rise in cases among students or employees, and it does not affect our operations for the spring 2021 semester.

Even with remote instruction, please know the **campus will remain open.** Students can continue to live in our residence halls and utilize dining services and have access to campus WiFi and resources like Chalmer Davee Library and research, lab, creative activity or other independent project spaces. Employees can continue to access offices and research and lab spaces as well.

A few additional details:

1. Campus will be staffed at levels needed to ensure all buildings are accessible for students remaining on campus after Thanksgiving. Supervisors should work with their employees, including student employees, to minimize on-campus staffing while maintaining delivery of services and accessibility to resources that students will need. New telecommuting arrangements must be approved by supervisors.
2. Students who return to the residence halls after Thanksgiving will be required to be **tested twice** the week of Nov. 30 to ensure the health and safety of all those who wish to remain on campus.

3. The Provost and Academic Deans will work with faculty and instructors to assure that the transition to remote learning will be a smooth one for students. They will be able to answer any questions about specific circumstances.

4. To help keep families and other communities safe, as already communicated, all residence hall students must get tested and all off-campus students are strongly encouraged to get tested before leaving campus if they plan to travel home for the Thanksgiving holiday.

5. Residence hall students will be receiving further communication from Residence Life to coordinate any student plans to leave campus or potentially to move out safely. Students have until December 1 to request an online learner exemption for spring semester.

6. Employees who plan to travel or gather with others outside of their household over Thanksgiving are encouraged to utilize the drive-thru testing site at David Smith Stadium to get tested before and after they travel.

This decision does not come easily. We had hoped to finish the semester with the limited in-person instruction activities currently offered being allowed to continue. Given the current trajectory of the virus in our region and the strain on our local healthcare systems, however, we feel that this decision is the most responsible next step we can take to help control the spread of this disease.

Falcons, thank you for being vigilant and responsible this semester. You have done a tremendous job keeping our campus, our community and each other safe. We are going to be sure that we keep it that way.

Sincerely,

Connie

**Connie Foster, Ph.D.**
Chancellor
University of Wisconsin-River Falls