

LA CROSSE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION SHARED STATEMENT

FALL 2020 - RETURN TO CAMPUS

As we near the arrival of fall, our attention once again turns to the start of another school year. This year, more than any other, the return of students to our campuses will be a welcome sight, a semblance of normalcy amid difficult times. But as the leaders of La Crosse's higher education institutions — UW-La Crosse, Viterbo University and Western Technical College — we realize we must continue to exercise caution and responsibility due to COVID-19.

Throughout the summer, our administrators, staff and faculty developed separate return-to-campus plans addressing the unique needs of our institutions while promoting shared values of health and safety. This begins with two requirements to which we should all be accustomed: face coverings and physical distancing. Each of our campuses requires that students, employees and visitors wear face coverings in our buildings, as well as outdoors when physical distancing is not possible. Everyone on our campuses is also expected to keep their distance (six feet or more) from others. We have taken various steps — from signage and floor stickers to changes in the way we deliver services — to make these expectations clear and lead by example.

Classes will also look different this semester. Some will be entirely online. Some will be hybrid. And some will be in person, in classrooms or labs suitable for physical distancing, and with the requirement to wear face coverings. In the spring, our faculty went to great lengths to move instruction to virtual formats. They have gone to even greater lengths to safely bring classes to students this fall.

We are prepared for the inevitability of COVID-19 cases on our campuses. As we have seen in recent months, no corner of our community is immune from the virus. Our campuses have developed testing and tracing protocols to help us pinpoint when and where cases arise, and take immediate action to prevent further spread. We have also secured isolation space, on and off campus, where infected students can safely recover. We implore everyone in our community to exercise caution. Heed the advice of health experts: Watch your distance, wear a face covering, wash your hands, and if you feel ill, stay home.

While we are making every effort to safely reopen our campuses, we realize we will not succeed with policies alone. The cooperation of students, employees and the community is critical. Each of us will play a key role not only in determining the outcome of the fall semester, but in ensuring the health and safety of the broader community. Our institutions will be receptive to changing guidance from local, national and international health experts, and we will be prepared to make necessary changes to our plans. The past several months have shown us that COVID-19 is pervasive and difficult to predict, but also manageable if everyone does their part. We ask that you join us in doing that, and help us achieve a safe and successful return to campus.

With gratitude,
President Glenna Temple, Viterbo University
Chancellor Joe Gow, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
President Roger Stanford, Western Technical College
Director Jennifer Rombalski, La Crosse County Health Department

