
Subject: Whitworth plans to reopen campus and resume classes for fall semester



April 28, 2020

Dear Whitworth family,

The coronavirus pandemic is testing us. Our world's public health systems, economies and political structures are under intense pressure while ordinary people like you and me have been asked to shelter in place, stay home from work, homeschool our children, and contribute to easing the significant burdens on our front-line healthcare providers.

As a result, it now appears that in most U.S. jurisdictions, and certainly in Eastern Washington, the rates of infection and hospitalization are flattening, and critical healthcare capacity is stabilizing. The signs are positive. But the economy is suffering, many aspects of our lives have been suspended, and we are now asking appropriate questions about how we begin to recover. The economy must be restarted safely and strategically so that Americans can get back to the lives to which we are called. It is in this context that Whitworth University is making plans for the 2020-21 academic year.

There are still many unanswered questions, but Whitworth's goal is to begin the fall semester in a residential, in-person format. That means that residence halls will be open, classes will be hosted on the main campus and in the University District, and our mind-and-heart education will resume in many of the familiar ways that contribute to the intellectual and spiritual formation of our students.

At the same time I communicate Whitworth's resolve to return to on-campus activities this fall, I also acknowledge the complex realities that face high-density, residential campuses like ours. Returning to a full state of normality may not be possible, but I am convinced that with the appropriate safeguards and practices, our students can continue with their education in the campus community they love. If ever there were questions about the value of residential higher education, I believe those questions have been answered by so many of our students lamenting what they have lost these past six weeks.

Whitworth's most sacred commitment is to the safety and well-being of its students and employees. As such, every precaution will be taken to monitor our

campus citizens' health and to make adjustments to schedules and routines as needed.

Our employees are expected to return to campus in the coming weeks, and a special task force is ensuring that Whitworth utilizes the best safety practices and equipment available to adhere to social distancing and other restrictions while they are in place. At the heart of Whitworth's educational mission are the staff and faculty members who serve our students with excellence. These capable employees are planning now for the start of the fall semester even as they attend to ensuring our students are able to finish the spring semester in good order.

Faculty members and administrators are also working to develop academic alternatives that can serve students no matter the circumstances they might face next year. For instance, while we plan to conduct classes in regular formats in the fall, faculty will be preparing to deliver excellent educational experiences in a variety of scenarios as needed. Even in the extreme cases in which the academic calendar might need to be adjusted, we are designing creative solutions so that students' educational plans aren't disrupted. Transformative mind-and-heart education will be provided to Whitworth's students, no matter the circumstances.

Our fantastic professionals in student life are also planning for the co-curricular offerings that are so essential to our students' development. Importantly, we are adding to our campus-based public health resources and community partnerships that will allow us to monitor and, if necessary, quickly isolate students who may be infected by, or exposed to, the coronavirus.

As I mentioned, it's difficult now to predict exactly how Whitworth will need to respond in the fall, but we are ready to do whatever is smart and safe in order to serve our students and employees well. We plan to adhere to state-level mandates and to the advice of our public health authorities as we develop and implement our plans. Our ability to creatively adapt to potentially changing circumstances will ensure that we care for our people well today and continue with the important work of educating our students for tomorrow.

Finally, I'm confident that closing our campus this spring was the right decision. Staying at home and providing education from a distance allowed our country's public health resources to be deployed effectively to minimize the impact of the virus's initial spread. And I'm proud of the ways Whitworthians have responded. I'm also persuaded that it is in our collective best interest to plan now for the return of on-campus operations this fall even as we prepare appropriate contingency plans.

By God's grace, and through the efforts of many, the Whitworth community will not just meet this test, but we will thrive and flourish as we have for 130 years. Together, we can live into Whitworth's enduring mission "to honor God, follow Christ and serve humanity," even, and especially, as we care for the health and well-being of the Whitworth family and provide the life-changing education our students need and deserve.

May God grant us peace, health, endurance and wisdom. Thank you for your many commitments to Whitworth.

Blessings,

Beck A. Taylor, Ph.D.
President

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