

November 14, 2020

Dear families and students,

As our students prepare for the end of the fall term and a well-deserved vacation, I write to share our plans for the upcoming winter and spring terms.

Without question, the success of this fall term has given us great confidence in the adaptability, flexibility and perseverance of our community members. We have seen, both in and out of the classroom, that even during a pandemic our students and faculty are capable of creating extraordinary moments. Building on the many successes of the fall term, our planning for the remainder of the year has focused on three considerations that have served as the foundation of every decision since the summer — the health and safety of the entire school community; providing an excellent academic and community experience; and flexibility to adapt to changing pandemic conditions.

Plan Highlights

1. Students will remain off campus studying remotely for two weeks in December and for the month of January (the full schedule is in a Q&A link at the end of this letter).
2. We will have a vacation from February 1-10, during which time students will self-quarantine at home and complete pre-travel COVID-19 testing (PCR) and faculty will prepare midterm comments on academic progress.
3. Students will return to campus between February 11-13 (no classes during these days).
4. Upon arrival, all students will receive a rapid antigen test and a second PCR test, followed by twice-weekly testing throughout both the winter and spring terms.
5. Students will remain on campus for the remainder of the school year, with a four-day break between the winter and spring terms, and built-in mini-breaks on campus scattered throughout the spring term.
6. Family choice remains in place. Students may elect to study remotely for the winter and/or spring term.

Advantages of the Plan

With the significant increases in COVID-19 cases in our county, state and across the United States, and based on continued guidance from numerous medical and infectious disease experts, a delayed return to campus is the most prudent path forward. The revised calendar has the following benefits:

1. Extends time off campus to allow for the number of active COVID-19 cases in our county and state to decline.
2. Avoids having students on campus during the coldest weeks of the year when outdoor activity is limited, and allows students to be on campus all of March to have a faster start to the spring term.
3. Reduces the amount of travel, which would add increased risk to all community and family members. Each student will have to go through only one period of restricted activity after travel pursuant to state guidelines.
4. With increased on-campus testing, allows greater opportunity to implement more in-person instruction (with a goal of in-person instruction being the backbone of our program in the spring) and more robust on-campus activities during the winter and spring terms.
5. Returning to campus under more favorable pandemic conditions and with more frequent testing also provides greater flexibility for more in-person interaction, both during structured times, such as classes, and during free time for informal socialization.

This fall has shown us that with adherence to health and safety protocols, and careful planning and monitoring, we are able to bring this community together in a manner that puts the well-being of every adult and student front and center every day. This gives us confidence in our decision to invite students back to campus in the manner outlined above.

It is clear that our students want to be together on campus and that they are eager for more flexibility in how they can interact with each other. We remain deeply committed to delivering a dynamic and innovative approach to our programming. Everything — from class instruction to the daily schedule, athletics, arts, student clubs, outdoor programming, residential and community life, and campus dining — is going to be enhanced by this approach. A continuing goal is to replicate moments of community building that are essential Exeter experiences and that bring the joy of living and learning in a residential community into the common daily experience. While we still must take the necessary precautions as dictated by pandemic conditions, we are busy developing opportunities to build on all that we achieved this fall.

Our time together this fall began with online instruction, which our students report has been a far more consistent and engaging experience than it was last spring. In recent weeks, we have begun experimenting with in-person classes and labs, which have proven to be quite successful. Our aim is to gradually increase those offerings when students return in February, with a commitment to make in-person instruction the backbone of our classroom experience for students in the spring term. As always, those decisions will be based on our ability to deliver in-person instruction in the safest manner possible. In the meantime, our students will begin their winter term as planned with remote learning now extended until the end of January. Throughout the fall term, the faculty has worked tremendously hard to implement new and innovative ways to deliver their course content. We are also continually examining our daily schedule to ensure we are identifying new and more effective ways of delivering synchronous and asynchronous instruction to support all students both on and off campus.

We will explore how best to engage and support those students who elect to study remotely for the term, and we will address any particular needs that students may have through the Dean of Students office. All students, whether they are living on campus, studying remotely for the term or are part of our day student community, are at the forefront of our thinking. How we support them regardless of their location is essential, and we recognize that remote students, day students and boarding students have the same desire for connectedness both in and out of the classroom. We will draw on the best practices from the fall while also looking for new and creative ways of building and maintaining community in the most equitable way possible.

We recognize that no plan is perfect and sacrifices will continue to be made until this pandemic is behind us. Yet, I have seen firsthand through my dorm duty nights in Wentworth and by spending time with students in other ways just how important it is for our students to be together and how grateful they are for all that our faculty and the adults on campus have done to support them. While we can't simply return to the way things were before the pandemic, this plan gives us the time, the flexibility and the confidence to help achieve more of what our students seek.

In the weeks ahead, we will send out updates on our plan as needed. In the meantime, I invite you to join me and other school leaders for a [town hall webinar](#) on Wednesday, November 18, at 7:00 p.m., when we will share more of what we are envisioning and take your questions.

With deep appreciation for your ongoing partnership,

Bill Rawson '71; P'08