



May 8, 2020

Dear Members of the StFX Community,

I'm writing to provide you with an update regarding StFX's ongoing response to the operational realities created by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

In my last communication to campus, I acknowledged the tremendous efforts by all StFX faculty and staff to support our students. It has been through our collective work that we have made it through the 'emergency phase' of our response to COVID-19, and that we are now able to shift our mindset to delivering the best educational experience possible in September.

Since the outset of the COVID-19 outbreak here in Nova Scotia, Premier Stephen McNeil and Dr. Robert Strang, Nova Scotia's Chief Medical Officer of Health, have provided strong and stable guidance in the face of deeply challenging circumstances. StFX continues to work closely with the province, including working toward a reopening of our campus and resuming normal operations.

We are preparing for classes to restart in September 2020, on-campus and in-person.

However, we must also be prepared for the possibility that physical distancing, moratoriums on group gatherings, and other health and safety-related protocols may continue into the fall. The circumstances of the campus opening are dependent upon provincial health guidelines. These guidelines are based on health conditions in the province meeting particular criteria, as opposed to being based upon dates in the calendar. As such, we are in the process of reviewing all of our operations and determining how best to open our campus for our students, faculty, and staff, while ensuring the health and safety of everyone.

Because the current situation regarding the pandemic is fluid and uncertain, we are also taking the prudent step to begin contingency planning to account for the possibility of online and alternative-format course delivery.

Remote Teaching and Learning (Online) Preparedness Task Force

Through the leadership of our Academic Vice President, Dr. Tim Hynes, we have established a task force on Remote Teaching and Learning (Online) Preparedness. Chaired by Janice Landry, from the Department of Distance and Continuing Education, and Dr. Joanne Tompkins, from the Faculty of Education, this task force has a very strict mandate -- 'to lead StFX efforts toward preparations for the 2020 fall term delivery of remote teaching and learning programming, should such distance education programming be necessary due to the ongoing COVID-19 health

crisis.’ This includes everything we believe necessary to produce and deliver academic courses of the highest quality online, from professional development requirements to assisting faculty and teaching staff with remote course delivery, to technology needs, to enhanced academic supports for students, and course and assignment design for optimal teaching and learning.

Of course, such a shift would represent a significant departure from StFX’s academic model, which is why investing the time in contingency planning for a smooth transition for faculty, staff, and students alike is a top priority. The task force members guiding these efforts include representatives from almost all areas of the university. On behalf of the university community, I express my gratitude for the important work they are undertaking in the weeks and months ahead.

Incoming and Returning Student Communications and Services

We recognize that uncertainty can create anxiety and doubt about what the future holds. Therefore, it is more important than ever that our students, both new and continuing, and their families feel confident about their decisions to attend StFX. Consequently, we are focused on ensuring students and parents are receiving the information they require in an efficient and effective way. From improvements in the way we present information online, to creating student and parent panels enabling direct channels for dialogue, and a range of other activities, we are committed to listening, understanding, and responding, to keep these very important members of our community updated.

I will also be providing regular updates to the campus community as we receive information from the province on changing circumstances as they relate to our operations.

I am very proud of the university’s response under these challenging circumstances and I am confident that we will continue to operate with the best interests of public health and our faculty, staff, and students at the forefront of our efforts. I applaud our collective, innovative work which is designed to serve our new and returning students, in ways that preserve the meaningful interactions that are so important to all of us in the university community.

Thanks to you all for your exemplary work during this pandemic and, moreover, the care and compassion that you have so generously shared with others.

Stay well.

Kevin B. Wamsley, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor
StFX University