

Trinity's Plans for the Fall

President Joanne Berger-Sweeney <President@trincoll.edu>

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To: President Joanne Berger-Sweeney <President@trincoll.edu>



July 1, 2020

Dear Trinity College Community Members,

In just a little more than two months, we'll begin the fall semester and, with it, a new chapter in the nearly 200-year history of this college and community. This semester and this chapter will be unlike any other. But our aim is to continue the long-standing tradition of providing an exceptional liberal arts education and to nurture a dynamic, resilient, and inclusive community, with safety, health, and well-being as our all-important guiding principles.

Today, with the support of so many colleagues, I'm delighted to announce that we have made significant progress in our planning for the fall and will welcome all who are able to join us safely on campus. As we've reported previously, contingent upon evolving public health guidance and conditions within the state, we will begin classes on Monday, September 7, and students will be able to move in to residence halls in gradual phases beginning in the last week of August.

As we have throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we will take a great number of actions—some small, some very large and complex—to minimize health risks on campus and to help safeguard the well-being of all students, faculty, and staff. An incredible amount of thoughtful planning by teams across campus has been devoted to this effort, and, of course, there is much more to do and many more decisions to make as we move toward fall. We will continue to be guided by the State of Connecticut's policies and recommendations with regard to managing the virus, as well as by recommendations from public health and infectious disease experts and organizations. Such guidance is evolving, and the state of the pandemic—while dramatically improved here in Connecticut—varies greatly by location, which means we will adapt our plans as needed to keep our community as safe as possible and to contribute to the global efforts to mitigate the pandemic. Here's what we know and

can share with you today. You can expect further details later in July.

Who will come to campus?

We can't wait to welcome you to campus! We look forward to seeing our returning students, and, in particular, we are excited to help make this a very special semester for our new students, especially the Class of 2024, many of whom experienced such disruption to the end of their high school careers.

We will welcome as many as 1,700 students to residence halls for the start of the semester. That is the maximum number of students for whom we can provide single bedrooms—a measure we feel is appropriate and necessary to minimize health risk.

In addition to those 1,700 students who may live in campus housing, we expect another 200 will reside nearby in off-campus housing. We anticipate this will accommodate all students who wish to return in the fall; we will know more after class registration (see below). We have about 150 students who live within a 25-mile radius of campus; if we reach our housing capacity, we will encourage those students to live at home during the fall semester and commute to campus for any in-person classes. Meanwhile, for a variety of reasons, we know that some number of students will not be able to return to campus and will need to take classes remotely.

For faculty and staff, we are beginning a [phased return-to-campus](#) plan next week, and we will repopulate as a workplace safely and with a reduced overall density for the foreseeable future. Some faculty and staff will continue to work remotely through the fall.

When and how will the campus “reopen”?

The campus never fully closed during the pandemic. I have been living here full time along with a number of students who were unable to return home, as well as staff supporting them and some essential operations. Many operations have been functioning remotely since mid-March, and buildings are accessible to Trinity ID cardholders only. We will bring more employees back to campus in early August, as we prepare for the arrival of students in late August.

We are scheduling staggered arrivals and move-in dates for students to facilitate physical distancing at the start of the semester. The details on testing are evolving as guidance from the state has changed in recent days. We will provide more information on COVID-19 testing for students, as well as specifics on arrival dates and times, in early August.

Please note that just last week, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey issued a joint [travel advisory](#) mandating that travelers into these states from areas with significant COVID-19 community spread (those states now deemed “hot spots” where the number of cases continues to grow) quarantine for 14 days. More details about that are forthcoming, and we will advise on the impact on our students and families from those areas as soon as we can.

We recognize that you're eager to know all the details and to make specific travel plans. But as we are finalizing our plans, we also must be mindful of the broader situation with the pandemic. What's happening elsewhere in the country and around the world could have a

significant impact on our plans, which should reinforce for us all how critical it is for everyone—no matter where you are—to be vigilant in practicing measures to mitigate the spread of this virus.

What will the campus experience be?

Academic

You've heard much already about our academic plans for the coming year. Many details are in [this letter from Acting Dean of Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs Sonia Cardenas](#). In short:

Course information will be available in full tomorrow, and academic advising will run from Monday, July 6, through Friday, July 10. Course registration begins for seniors on Monday, July 13; for juniors, Wednesday, July 15; and for sophomores, Friday, July 17. First-year students will submit their course choices beginning on Monday, July 20. Advising week for graduate students begins on July 6, with course registration beginning on July 13.

To accommodate students and faculty needs, fall courses will be offered in different formats. For registration, each class will be designated as in-person, hybrid, or remote. Remote and hybrid options will be especially important for students and faculty who cannot be on campus. Regardless of the format, our faculty members are committed to offering high-quality, meaningful, and personalized interactions with students and to teaching the courses in a manner commensurate with the high expectations of a Trinity College education.

Our academic year will consist of four terms. Fall-term courses will run either 10 weeks or 13 weeks, depending on the needs of the course. In-person learning for the fall would conclude by Friday, November 20 (students would not return to campus after the November vacation break). Thirteen-week classes would continue remotely through December, with exams for all concluding by Monday, December 21.

There will be a 5-week, optional, remote winter term beginning in January. There will be a 10- or 13-week spring term, a mirror image to the fall semester, followed by a 5-week, optional summer term here on campus, assuming conditions allow. Students will be able to take up to 11.5 credits across all four terms.

Faculty members are working hard to strengthen the remote learning experience for students. All courses taught remotely next year will be expected to meet during the assigned time, and we will do our best to accommodate students across time zones. Faculty this summer are being trained in the best practices of remote instruction, and they are participating in hands-on course-design studios led by national experts. We are enhancing technology in our classrooms (including adding more cameras, microphones, and other equipment) to improve both the in-person and remote learning experience.

We are energized by the prospect of bringing the strengths of the liberal arts to bear on a personalized brand of digital learning this year.

Access to academic facilities is crucial to students' engagement with the community, including their professors and peers, as well as research and projects. While we know that

some activities may be limited as we work to maintain physical distancing to protect the health and safety of our community, our faculty members are excited to restart student research in their labs, to have students creating art in our studios, and to facilitate community engagement in as full and rich a manner as possible.

The Center for Academic Advising will host two information sessions next week for academic registration: one on Wednesday, July 8, at 7:00 p.m. for returning students and one on Thursday, July 9, at 7:00 p.m. for first-year students. Dean Cardenas will be writing to students tomorrow with more detailed information about course registration.

Residential

As noted above, all students living on campus in the fall will have their own bedrooms. Some will live in singles, others in suites with common rooms. No bedrooms on campus will be configured for more than one person.

The housing lottery will open on Tuesday, July 14, for seniors and continue on ensuing days for juniors and sophomores. Housing assignments will be made the week of July 20. First-year students will be assigned to housing based on their nest and their first-year seminar assignment. First-year students will receive their housing assignment in August.

Dining

Safe and healthy dining on campus is not only an important part of maintaining individual health but also an important part of building community. Chartwells, our dining partner, is committed to the safety and well-being of our campus community, guests, and associates. Their practices will include daily wellness checks of associates and delivery drivers, increased sanitizing and disinfecting, the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE), extensive associate training, and informational signage. We are working with Chartwells to create a plan for our dining facilities that ensures compliance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state, and local guidelines. We will share more details about meal plans and dining options in the coming weeks, but you can anticipate a variety of to-go options and staffed stations with more limited seating within the dining venues.

Campus life and athletics

There's no question that campus life will be different because of the pandemic. We will insist upon physical distancing and face coverings consistently, and we will limit the size of gatherings and events, whether indoor or outdoor. You can find more on those measures below. Here, I want to reassure you that we are thinking creatively about how to make the most of our on-campus experience together (while also engaging with those who can't join us in person) and to allow for safe campus activities, student employment, and more.

Athletics are an integral part of the Trinity experience. The NCAA has proposed a phased return to sports that depends on the virus not resurging on college campuses. Our own conference, the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC), has stated:

Athletics engagement is an important part of the experience for many of our students, and member institutions remain committed to this experience. However, this will not be a traditional fall on campus in any respect, including for athletics. The conference continues to

develop plans for the return to athletics ...”

It's clear that the fall (and likely winter) season of athletic competition will not occur as usual. We will have significantly fewer, if any, competitions in the fall, but we are aiming for physically distanced practices for in- and out-of-season sports and activities to engage our athletes. Our Athletics Department (administrators and coaches alike) has been extremely creative in determining how to engage scholar-athletes during this nontraditional fall season. And we are grateful that their creativity also is informing how to return gradually to other close-contact activities, such as dance. We will keep you informed over the summer, as plans for athletics continue to take shape.

How much will it cost?

[As reported in the budget letter](#) I shared with faculty and staff last week, one important decision we have made this year is to not raise the comprehensive fee for students in the coming year. Tuition and room and board fees will remain flat, [at 2019–20 levels](#), and will cover the four terms of the new academic calendar; financial aid also will apply across these terms. We know that our families need additional flexibility and support during this time.

You may ask if we will charge different tuition rates based on whether a class is remote or in person. We will not. All of our students will continue to have access to small classes and personalized interactions with extraordinary faculty members. Our tuition covers instruction inside and outside of the classroom, including career services, health services including mental health, athletics activities, and so many other items that we consider essential for a holistic liberal arts education experience. As stated earlier in this letter, those services will continue to be available for our students, and they will be available with greater flexibility over the four terms of the academic year. Most importantly, we all are committed to support our students as they navigate this unprecedented time in our country and our world.

How will we keep Trinity healthy and safe?

Note that I didn't write, "How will *you* (Trinity) keep *us* (students, faculty, staff) safe?" That's because it is our collective responsibility to care for this community—at all times, including during a pandemic. We—the administration, our emergency planners, and our service and health care providers—will attend to the health and safety of our campus and community in myriad ways, some of which are outlined below. But you—individual students, families, faculty, and staff—have an important role to play as well. If we have learned anything from the past several months, it is that disease can spread rapidly in a community; it is significantly reduced when that community unites against it. At the time of this writing, Connecticut is a strong example of a united community; it is one of the few states in the country in which infection and hospitalization rates for COVID-19 continue to decrease.

Protect the nest

Everyone on campus will be required to follow important health and safety practices and protocols, the most fundamental of which are:

- Face coverings/masks
- Physical distancing (including reduced sizes of social gatherings)
- Frequent handwashing

- Self-monitoring for symptoms
- Mandatory public health education

If each of us commits to those fundamentals, we can go a long way toward keeping our community safe. For all of those arriving on campus, we will provide detailed guidance about those fundamentals—when exactly those face coverings are necessary, what kind of face coverings are acceptable, what we mean by physical distancing and in what situations, how people should monitor for symptoms, and what people should do if they experience symptoms or test positive.

Students and employees will be tested for COVID-19 on a regular basis throughout the semester. The precise method, scope, and frequency of that testing is to be determined as state recommendations are changing frequently. We are committed to exceeding the minimum testing recommendations from the state because we know that regular testing is one critical component to monitoring the health of our community and containing the virus if it is detected.

Similar to our peer institutions, Trinity will require students to sign a Community Responsibility Agreement—which the college is developing in partnership with our Student Government Association and Inter-Greek Council—that will reinforce the need for students to be vigilant in following public health guidance and college policies regarding COVID-19. We also will limit unnecessary travel off campus for students to limit the risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19.

All who come to campus, including faculty and staff, will be required to do daily symptom checks and asked not to report to campus if they are experiencing symptoms.

Earlier in the spring, we established protocols for quarantine, isolation, and contact tracing to address cases of the virus or direct exposure to it. We will expand upon and enhance those plans for the fall, with a team of Trinity College health staff and others trained to support contact tracing.

In terms of the campus itself, we are enhancing cleaning and sanitizing across all spaces, and hand sanitizer will be available at entrances to buildings, classrooms, and dining halls. Disposable wipes and cleaning solutions will be available in all bathrooms, classrooms, and shared facilities, and supplies will be provided so that staff and faculty may clean and sanitize their offices and workspaces.

Classrooms, dining halls, and activity spaces are being reconfigured to allow for appropriate physical distancing (significantly reducing classroom density).

And, based on the recommendations of the CDC and in consultation with our emergency operations groups, we will follow guidelines provided by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers to review and confirm compliance of our HVAC systems across buildings and will remediate or discontinue use of spaces that do not comply.

Following state guidelines, plans are being developed and will be submitted to the state

regarding how we will:

- Repopulate campus
- Monitor the health of the community
- Contain the virus when detected
- Shut down campus if necessary

We know you'll have questions. Some we can answer now (please email PlansToReturn@trincoll.edu with questions or feedback), but many answers will be developed in the coming days as we continue to monitor the situation locally and globally and as we make decisions based on guidance from the state and other authorities and the best interests of all members of our community. We will publish a new Frequently Asked Questions list on our return-to-campus website in the coming week and will update it and other content there frequently as we move toward the fall.

In addition to the academic information sessions mentioned above, we'll be hosting a number of informational town halls as we get closer to the start of the semester, at which we'll invite your questions and provide you with the most up-to-date information.

Thank you for your patience and understanding. We are as eager as all of you to get on the other side of this pandemic and move toward the bright future we all envision for Trinity.

Sincerely,

Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Ph.D., M.P.H.
President and Trinity College Professor of Neuroscience