



FIVE TOWNS COLLEGE

February 5, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

We hope this letter finds you and your loved ones well.

We write to update you on the important decisions that affect you, particularly regarding the resumption of classes for the Spring 2021 semester and beyond. This letter constitutes an addendum to the Five Towns College Reopening Plan, which was adopted last summer.

In Part I below you will find the summary decisions that have been reached. For many, these decisions and the rationale behind them will be self-evident. For those who would like more insight into the factors which influenced the decisions, Part II provides more in-depth discussion and analysis.

We continue to receive your questions and suggestions. They are appreciated. If you still have concerns after reading this memo, please do not hesitate to share them via reply email. We will respond to everyone.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, College Administration, Faculty, and Staff, I look forward to welcoming you all back to campus for the Spring 2021 semester. I also extend best wishes for your successful completion of Winter/J-Term. Please continue to stay safe and practice social distancing.

Sincerely

David M. Cohen, J.D.
President

Part I. Calendar Updates and Related Policies

1. Spring Semester 2021

The Spring 2021 semester will start on Monday, March 22, 2021. The semester will continue for 12 weeks and conclude on Monday, June 14, 2021. A copy of the *revised* Spring 2021 Semester Calendar will be available on the Five Towns College website shortly.

2. Course Modality

Spring 2021 courses will be delivered either on-ground, online, or in a hybrid manner, just as they were designated at the time of registration. There will be no change. If you are unsure of the modalities of your classes, or if you wish to change them, please contact your academic advisor for assistance.

3. Residence Halls Reopen

Residence Halls will officially reopen on Sunday, March 21 for all resident students. Arrival and check-in dates may be earlier for some students in order to maximize the opportunity for social distancing. Resident students should contact the Residence Life Office for exact move-in dates.

4. Meal Plans

Meal Plans will be active effective lunchtime March 21st. Resident students arriving earlier may have their declining dollars activated sooner. Food Service will resume on a limited basis on or about March 13th.

5. Social Distancing Requirements

Campus social distancing requirements remain in effect, as they were for the Fall 2020 semester. The College will continue to monitor CDC Guidelines, with the hope that some of these restrictions may be relaxed as the positivity rates continue to flatten/decline and vaccine distribution becomes more widespread.

6. COVID-19 Testing

All students, faculty, and staff must present proof of a negative COVID-19 Test prior to returning to campus. Test results from 2020 are not acceptable. Those who will be fully remote and will not be on campus at all are exempt from this requirement.

A new test must be taken in the seven-day period prior to March 22nd, and may not be a rapid-test – which is less reliable. Tests may be taken at the on-campus test clinic noted below, or they may be taken independently at the medical provider of your choice. Please note that the testing schedule noted below is subject to change. Due to the high demand for testing across the nation currently, the plan to test for the spring semester may be modified. If you choose to use an independent lab, you are responsible for uploading proof of your negative test result directly to healthrecords@ftc.edu.

6.1. Pre-Semester On-Campus Testing

Pre-semester On-Campus testing will be offered on:

March 13, 2021, Saturday. Pre-registration is required.

6.2. Mandatory Covid-19 Testing for Resident Student, Resident Staff, and Essential Workers (Maintenance, Food Service, Public Safety)

Mandatory Testing will take place on the following dates:

April 13, 2021, Tuesday, and

May 11, 2021, Tuesday

Due to community spread concerns and compliance issues that arose during the Fall 2020 semester, all required individuals must participate in this event on campus. You may not use an independent test provider without written authorization from the Dean of Students. Any student or staff member who does not participate without having been excused will be immediately barred from campus.

6.3. Random Sample Testing

The College will conduct Random Sample Testing of approximately 20% of commuter students and non-essential campus workers on each Mandatory Testing date noted above. If you are selected for this test you are required to participate. Failure to participate will result in immediate suspension from campus life.

6.4. Voluntary Testing

Voluntary Testing may be available for other members of the community on a space available basis on Mandatory Testing Dates. Pre-registration is required.

6.5. Voluntary End of Semester Departure Testing for Resident Students

As of this date the College is planning to offer voluntary end-of-semester Covid-19 testing for resident students planning to return home at the conclusion of the semester. This is designed to provide assurances to family members that students are coronavirus free before coming into contact with family members. The College is mindful that with widespread distribution of the vaccine later this spring, this testing date may become moot. This test may be available on or about:

June 8, 2021, Tuesday

7. Pre-Semester Precautionary Quarantine

New York State Department of Health Guidelines require Pre-Semester Precautionary Quarantine for students returning to campus from states which are non-contiguous to New York State. Students returning to campus from the following states are exempt:

- Connecticut
- Massachusetts
- New Jersey
- Pennsylvania
- Vermont

Students from any other locales outside of New York State must participate in Pre-Semester Precautionary Quarantine.

7.1. Pre-semester Precautionary Quarantine Guidelines

Students returning to campus from any place other than a New York address or from a state with a contiguous border to NY must present a negative Covid-19 test result, which must be taken no more than three days prior to their departure for Five Towns College. The result must be emailed to healthrecords@ftc.edu prior to departure for campus.

Upon arrival on campus, out-of-town students will enter into Precautionary Quarantine in Harmony Hall for a period of four days. On the fifth day they will be retested on-campus. If the second test result is negative, they will be released from Precautionary Quarantine. If the test is positive, they will be moved to Isolation and referred to medical providers.

Pre-Semester Precautionary Quarantine Students must arrive at the College on Tuesday, March 9th. The proof of negative Covid-19 test must be received prior to your arrival. The proof must document that the test was taken no earlier than Friday, March 6th. Students arriving without proof of a negative test result will be barred from entering the campus. Pre-Semester Precautionary Quarantine students will then be re-tested four days after arriving - when the on-campus clinic is held - on Saturday, March 13th. Once a positive test result is received, Pre-Semester Precautionary Quarantine Students will be free to move about the campus. The College anticipates that test results will take 3 to 5 days to process. Most Pre-Semester Precautionary Quarantine Students should be cleared on or before March 18th, just prior to the reopening of campus.

Pre-Semester Precautionary Quarantine Students will not be charged for the additional housing period. However, they will be responsible for any additional food charges incurred.

8. Vaccinations for Instructional Faculty

Instructional faculty teaching on-ground are now eligible to receive a vaccination pursuant to New York State Department of Health Guidelines for Level 1B recipients. The Academic Affairs Office has issued 70 letters to individual faculty members attesting to their eligibility to now receive the vaccination. This proof may be required at the time of vaccination. Members of the Instructional faculty who have not received an eligibility letter should contact the College Provost.

9. Vaccination Pop-Up Clinic

The College is currently in discussions to host an on-campus pop-up vaccination clinic for students and other eligible recipients when shots become more readily available and when students are deemed eligible to participate. The College has not reached a decision as to whether or not vaccinations will be mandatory for any segment of the campus population. We will keep you informed as guidance is released by the CDC and the NYS DOH.

10. FTC CARES Act Fund (CARES 1)

Five Towns College students were allocated \$430,074 through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES 1). As of today, the College has expended \$364,494 as direct grants to eligible students. Approximately \$65,000 remains in the fund, although additional applications amounting to approximately \$35,000 are currently pending. The balance of remaining funds is being held pending receipt of applications from approximately 30 students whom the College believes to be eligible. All of these students have been contacted. The College has designated March 15, 2021 as the last date upon which it will accept applications for the FTC CARES Act program. After that date, any remaining funds will be transferred to the CRRSAA Act Fund, now being established.

11. FTC CRRSA Act Funding (CARES 2)

Earlier this year legislation for the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSAA) was signed into law. Sometimes referred to as CARES 2, this fund will provide approximately \$470,000 in additional direct grants to eligible Five Towns College students. Because the College anticipates that approximately \$30,000 will remain in its CARES Act 1 Fund on March 15, it expects to distribute approximately \$500,000 to eligible students during the Spring 2021 semester through CRRSA.

While CARES Act 1 funding was only available to students who were enrolled at the time when the National Health Emergency was declared last year, CRRSA Act 2 funding will also be open to new students who enrolled during the 2020-21 Academic Year. Unlike CARES Act 1, students do not need to be FAFSA filers, although the U.S. Secretary of Education has requested that the College prioritize grants to the most financially needy students.

The U.S. Secretary of Education has mandated that students seeking to participate in either program sign an application/certification form. Even if the College deems a student to be eligible, if you have not filed an application for CARES 1 by the deadline or CARES 2 when it becomes available, you will not receive funding.

The College is finalizing its application to participate in CRRSAA funding, and will release additional information, including instructions on who is eligible and how to apply, in the next few weeks.

12. Graduation Ceremony for the Classes of 2020 and 2021

Please see commentary in Part II, below.

13. Remote Work Approvals for Faculty and Staff

Members of the professional staff and faculty with approval to work remotely, must obtain reapproval to remain remote after the start of the Spring 2021 semester. It is the expectation of the College that all employees will return to campus as their personal situations permit in consideration of the availability of approved vaccinations.

PART II. In-Depth Analysis Regarding Decisions

1. Spring Semester 2021 Calendar Dates

In the *Five Towns College Plan for Reopening* published last summer, the College anticipated that the National Health Emergency might not be resolved before the start of the Spring 2021 semester. In that Plan, the College announced that the spring term would not begin before March 1, and that it could start as late as April 5, depending upon the public health conditions.

In January 2021 the College conducted a non-binding survey of all students and faculty to obtain their preferences regarding a start date. The survey sought to determine if there was a preference for beginning class on March 1, April 5, or in a hybrid manner with online classes beginning March 1 and on-ground and hybrid classes beginning April 5.

Overwhelmingly, nearly 70% of those surveyed preferred to begin class on March 1. The results were the same when sorted by faculty, resident students, and commuter students.

The College then held focus group discussions with representatives of each segment of the population, where each group was provided with more detailed information about the current public health situation in Suffolk County and how that would impact the way the spring semester was conducted.

In every case, focus group participants who initially chose the March 1 date changed their opinion and preferred the later date. In making their choice, they cited concerns about public health and the improved chances of some return to normalcy during the second half of the semester with a later start. Faculty participants noted that the later start improved the likelihood that they could receive a vaccination either before or shortly after the start of classes with the later calendar.

Ultimately, the decision to begin classes on March 22 was guided by these preferences, medical realities, and statistical forecasting. During most of the Fall 2020 semester, the Coronavirus positive infection rate in Suffolk County remained under 1%. When the College closed just prior to Thanksgiving, the positivity rate in Suffolk was just over 2%. With those rates in the broader community, the College concluded the fall term with an institutional positivity rate of 3% for students. At the same time, nearly 28% of all resident students were required to participate in mandatory precautionary quarantine at some point during the fall term.

As of yesterday, February 3, the positivity rate in New York State was 4.4%, or more than double what it was when on-ground classes ended before Thanksgiving. The positivity rate in Suffolk County yesterday was 5.1%. With this data, it would be reasonable to conclude that Five Towns College would have a positivity rate significantly higher than it experienced when it made the decision to close prior to Thanksgiving should the College open too soon.

The data, however, is encouraging and suggests that a delayed start will be safer. On January 14, 2021, the positivity rate in New York State was 6.1%, when the second wave peaked as predicted. Since that time, the rate has been steadily declining. As noted above, yesterday – three weeks later – the rate was 4.4%. If the rate continues to decline at a consistent pace of 1.7 pts. every three weeks, forecasters predict that the rate will be about 2.7% on or about March 1, and about 1% on or about March 22. That would be a rate which is similar to the positivity rate when the College successfully opened for the Fall 2020 semester.

For this reason, the March 22nd start date was selected. Because most experts concur that the rate will not fall much lower prior to the widespread vaccination of Americans, there is little reason to delay the restart of classes beyond that date.

Although the positivity rate of those being tested may level off later in the semester, the risk of infection will continue to fall as distribution of vaccines continues to become more widespread. As of yesterday, February 3, 2021, approximately 10% of the New York State population has been vaccinated, with about 250,000 residents scheduled to be vaccinated each week. With each passing week the level of vaccination will continue to rise. The pace of vaccination is even expected to accelerate after April 1, with the anticipated release of 100 million additional vaccine doses by Johnson & Johnson, to supplement the supply now being distributed by Pfizer and Moderna Pharmaceuticals.

At the current pace, 25% of all New Yorkers may be vaccinated by March 22nd. As the spring semester progresses, by the end of April that number could reach 40%. As the vaccination rate climbs and the infection positivity rate falls in early May, the improving public health environment could have a dramatic impact at Five Towns College.

An improved public health environment would provide assurances that the College would not have to close prematurely or disrupt on-ground classes, and it would provide an improving campus environment where theatrical productions, musical performances, senior recitals, music juries, and other events might be reintroduced safely into campus life. These are important facets at an institution of higher education that is dedicated to the performing arts, such as Five Towns College.

All of these factors contributed to the consensus among institutional leaders that the best decision for Five Towns College is to resume classes on March 22, 2021.

2. 12-Week Term

Previously the College announced that the Spring term, regardless of when it began, would be 12 weeks in length. This model has been approved by the New York State Education Department, the U.S. Department of Education, and by the College's accreditors. Many other colleges and universities have transitioned to the 12-week model from the traditional 15-week model for the duration of the pandemic.

While the length of the semester will be shortened under this model, the amount of contact hours that students are expected to have in their classes remains unchanged. Students will be expected to complete all of the same learning activities, but in a more condensed format. This is not unlike summer and winter term study, when students learn in a more condensed format. As noted in the Reopening Plan, there will not be an adjustment to tuition, fees or residence hall charges as a result of this modification. Meal Plans have already been reduced by \$500 each semester to reflect the shorter residential period.

3. No Spring Break or other Holidays

While the College will not penalize any student that chooses not to attend class in observance of a religious holiday, everyone is encouraged to avoid large family gatherings regardless of the reason. This is particularly important for resident students.

It was clearly the holiday celebration period that began just prior to Thanksgiving and continued through New Year's Eve which led to the massive positivity spikes across the nation just a few weeks ago. For this reason, nearly every college and university has cancelled spring break and other holidays, so that students are not sent home where the virus is more likely to take advantage of community spread and then return to infect the college community.

Students are reminded that if they engage in activities that are not socially distanced, they are required to self-disclose and to self-quarantine. In view of the number of cases at the end of last fall, the College will discipline any student who knowingly violates this policy.

4. Commencement Exercises for the Classes of 2020 and 2021.

Five Towns College is committed to in-person celebrations at graduation. The College does not believe that virtual graduations are a reasonable substitute at a performing arts institution. The College will hold the long overdue graduation ceremony for the Class of 2020 as soon as the public health situation improves. It will hold either a combined ceremony with the Class of 2021, or the Class of 2021 will be scheduled as soon thereafter as is possible. These events are likely to be held late this summer or early next fall. Exact dates will be announced once the restriction on large public gatherings is lifted by the New York State Governor.

5. 2021 – 22 Academic Year Planning

All health experts are now predicting that the public health emergency is likely to be under control by the Fall 2021. Some predict that the emergency may even be lifted. With that in mind, the College is planning for a return to relative normalcy for the Fall 2021 semester. There will, however, be some permanent changes. These include:

- More online and hybrid classes for those students who prefer to pursue some courses remotely;
- An expanded Winter/J-Term with free and low-cost courses for full-time students, which runs approximately January 1 to February 28.
- A later start for Spring Term, with classes that run approximately March 1 to June 21.
- One Summer Session, with free and low-cost courses for full-time students, which runs approximately July 1 to August 15.