



For immediate release — Tuesday, February 9, 2021

University of Lethbridge planning for significant return to campus for Fall 2021 semester

Anticipating positive shifts in the coming months related to COVID-19 pandemic health directives, the University of Lethbridge is planning for a significant return to campus for the Fall 2021 semester.

A special working group is currently consulting with faculty and others and working to determine how to offer as many course experiences on campus as possible, while ensuring the health of its students, faculty and staff in compliance with public health directives.



“We acknowledge the past year has been tough on our campus community,” says Mike Mahon, U of L president and vice-chancellor. “I am so proud of the resiliency our community has shown during this time and excited about the prospect of seeing the lively, energetic campus atmosphere we’ve all missed so much. It will be great for our students to begin to once again experience the social and academic benefits a more traditional in-person setting offers.”

While actions to safely increase in-person experiences are considered for the Fall 2021 semester, the Summer semester will remain much the same as it is for the current Spring 2021 semester. This will allow students to study while balancing summer activities, family life, and work from wherever they currently live.

In addition to a significant increase of in-person classes, the working group is also exploring how labs, seminars, student services, work-integrated learning opportunities and on-campus events can return to in-person and blended formats.

The U of L's Calgary Campus is located within Bow Valley College (BVC) and the University will engage in planning discussions with BVC about in-person classes before decisions are made for Fall 2021.

Residence spaces have been available for students throughout the pandemic at reduced capacity, and University officials anticipate a significant increase in the number of students living on campus this fall. Consistent with this expectation, the U of L is launching a new initiative to bring together on-campus living with targeted career-preparation programming. This living/learning community in residence is designed to provide students with institutional and peer support as they prepare for their professional careers and will be launched in the coming months.

While a significant in-person experience is anticipated, it is likely some health directives pertaining to the use of masks and physical distancing will remain in place. These restrictions may prevent the U of L from offering some of its classes in person. Considerations, like these, are top of mind for the working group as it undertakes its planning.

Progress on the work to reopen campus for Fall 2021 will be shared in regular intervals with the campus community. A more significant announcement is being planned for March 2021.

"As was the case when the University closed its campus in the early days of the pandemic, there are many logistical and safety considerations to reopening. We will use our planning time to ensure we create safe face-to-face experiences," says Mahon. "We will continue to communicate our reopening plans through public messaging, and Student Affairs will hold special information sessions for students to answer any questions they may have."

While it is expected that the University will be much more open come September 2021, so too will the City of Lethbridge. Mahon says he is constantly approached by members of the community who are anxious to see the influx of students return to the City.

"The energy that students bring to the city of Lethbridge has always been appreciated by the larger community and citizens, organizations and businesses have repeatedly expressed to me their desire to see the opening of the U of L and return of its students. While student experience happens on our campus, it also occurs because of the amenities offered by the broader community."

To view online: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/university-lethbridge-planning-significant-return-campus-fall-2021-semester>

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