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Report of the Group Working on Return to Campus

Part I: Summary of the report

In many ways, Williams is in a much better position to open the campus in the fall than most other colleges. However, opening will never be risk free, and the degree of risk will largely depend on the local public health situation outside of our control, as well as on the behavior of all people on campus.

On the positive side, we are a small community with a considerable amount of space, capable of maintaining a low density of living and working even if all students were to return to campus. The local prevalence of COVID-19 is currently very low, and local hospitals are confident that they have the capacities to accommodate Williams students and employees in addition to community members, should an outbreak occur.

Williams will participate in a consortium with other colleges to have the Broad Institute provide testing services. Broad assures us that it has both the test kits and the supplies to test all people present on campus as often as needed. Our current plan is to test everyone who will be on campus before the classes start, and re-test 7-10 days later. In addition, there will be regular testing throughout the semester (current expectation is that we will carry out weekly tests for students); of course, anyone who reports symptoms consistent with COVID-19 will be tested promptly. There will be quick and efficient contact tracing of those who test positive, followed by mandatory isolation of the people they have been in contact with. According to current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, quarantine should last for a period of 14 days. We have secured 30 isolation and 65 quarantine beds, which is less than 10% of the likely student population on campus (we expect around 1500 students). Obviously, in case of an outbreak, isolation and quarantine would have to be extended to pods (see below). We have developed plans for delivering food and medical care to students in isolation or quarantine.

We are confident that we will have abundant quantities of the whole range of PPE, needed in different contexts, and readily available for all who need them.

Our Health Center will be reconfigured and sufficiently staffed to conduct both its regular work and COVID-19 related caseload. Student Health and Wellness Services will provide medical and integrative wellbeing services via telehealth whenever possible, and students needing more intensive care will be transported to a local hospital in accordance with CDC protocols.

Reopening assumes that all state guidelines concerning masks, social distancing, adhering to limitations of permissible sizes of groups meeting in person, hygienic and testing protocols, etc., will be followed. A Community Health Commitment will be signed by all present on campus. Students,

faculty and staff will be encouraged to remind each other of the rules governing behavior in public spaces. Throughout the campus, there will be clear signs indicating appropriate distance between people and directing pedestrian traffic patterns.

Based on recent surveys, we expect around 1500 students to return to campus if we open, and above 50% of the faculty to teach in person (albeit frequently in a hybrid form). All staff members capable of working remotely will be encouraged to do so, and the tasks of those who must work in person will be re-organized in such a way to lessen the risk of infection. Students and faculty should also aim to do remotely any work that can be done effectively in that way. We will follow state guidelines in determining the largest possible number of people gathering in an indoors space with masks and proper distancing. Large parties and all kinds of performances, sports and social events will likely not be permissible. Travel and visitors to the campus will also be severely restricted, exemptions being granted on a case-by-case basis and always with a view not only of individual needs but also of larger campus safety.

We will be able to accommodate up to 1600 students in single rooms, with no more than six students sharing a bathroom; this small group will constitute a ‘pod’ – a family-like unit which will not require strict social distancing in mutual interactions. Dining will be available to all students, but not to faculty or staff; also, there will be no seating in the dining halls. All food will be distributed on a ‘grab-and-go’ model. The Faculty House will be closed.

We believe that there are enough suitable spaces for teaching all in-person parts of the curriculum, since many rooms serving other purposes will be transformed into well-equipped classrooms.¹ The faculty approved the 20/21 class-hour schedule which abolishes the division of the day and thus allows for sufficient time between classes for cleaning and transit between possibly very distant buildings.

Academic units are adapting their programs to the new circumstances (fully or partially remote, or in-person with social distancing), as are the leaders of co-curricular and extracurricular student activities. We are confident that Williams will continue to offer excellent education and valuable college experience if we return, although new forms of teaching, learning and interacting will require imaginative readjustments from all involved. We expect that all courses will be available to on-campus and remote students. Since we will not be able to accommodate more than 30 students in any of the classrooms, we expect that courses with enrollments higher than that will conduct at least some instruction remotely. OIT is fully aware of faculty’s different instructional needs, and they are working very hard on delivering all technological tools that will be wanted. Although some difficulties still remain to be surmounted, we are optimistic that most of them will be resolved. We hope that the faculty and students will accept occasional glitches with flexibility and humor. However, those of us who participated in recent hybrid classroom simulations are skeptical that the current technology will be able to ensure the simultaneous equal participation of remote students and socially distant, masked students in the classroom. Each modality presents challenges absent in the other modality; perhaps the two groups could be united in lectures, but taught separately in discussion classes.

There are also other areas that warrant additional contingency planning over the coming weeks. We are confident that we will have enough resources to care for students who become ill or need to be in isolation or quarantine at the levels that we currently expect given the protective

¹ We do not recommend the purchase or use of tents.

measures that will be in place. It is impossible to know for certain, however, how the pandemic may evolve, and we should develop response plans for outbreaks of any magnitude.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of the coming year will be that reducing the risk to the entire community requires every person on campus--faculty, staff, and students--to comply with the college's public health rules and protective measures. To prevent outbreaks of the sort recently seen in the states and countries that prematurely eased their restrictions, we'll need mechanisms to ensure the continued enforcement of ours.² If, despite all our careful planning, education and enforcement efforts, we were not able to manage the risks to the campus and community, the college should be fully prepared to send most students home and switch to exclusively remote instruction in a safe and orderly way.

We expect local daycare and schools to be open but this could be with reduced capacities and shorter, possibly fluctuating, hours. Disruptions of this sort would put many of our faculty and staff in a bind, forcing them to choose between work and childcare. These contingencies also warrant additional planning.

Several operational departments have indicated that their work can properly be done only with additional hires. Some of these hires are seen as necessary for the normal, ongoing work which will be vastly more demanding if we return (for example, this is the case in the Health Center), while other potential hires are needed to ensure smooth functioning of the essential operations on campus should a number of regular employees fall ill (for example, dining and custodial services). Hiring is often a long and complicated process, and new hires usually need to be properly trained and sometimes vetted (day care employees, for example) for their new jobs. While we are very confident that temporary hiring in dining and custodial departments will be easy, we are concerned about more specialized positions, such as tradespeople and childcare workers. These areas may require additional planning.

Finally, should President Mandel decide to open the campus in the fall, all members of the Williams Community - but especially students - need to learn before July 10th as many *details* as possible about the likely life and work on campus.

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² We discussed the possibility of commenting on appropriate and desirable disciplinary actions in cases of repeated or dramatic rule breaking, but concluded that our group is not in a position to make recommendations on this sensitive issue, beyond stating the obvious: some institutional response may be necessary in some cases, and all such responses should be carefully calibrated and equitable. We trust that there are other groups on campus better positioned than we are to articulate a consistent, fair and workable procedure.