

Massachusetts State Universities Say Students Will Return in September

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State universities in Bridgewater, Fitchburg, Framingham, Salem, Westfield and Worcester plan in September to bring students back to campuses, where they are scheduled to return to dorms and attend on-campus classes as the state copes with the uncertainties posed by COVID-19.

The state universities, in addition to the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams, Mass. College of Art and Design in Boston, and the Mass. Maritime Academy in Buzzards Bay, plan to offer a “blended model of instruction with face-to-face and remote coursework for the fall semester.”

The public higher education institutions announced their plans Thursday night, about three months after students were sent off campuses to pursue remote learning.

“Because the state universities have very few large lecture-style classes, and maintain low student-to-faculty ratios, we are confident our campuses will be able to provide students some level of in-classroom instruction,” said Vincent Pedone, executive director of the State Universities Council of Presidents. “Our campuses are well-positioned to adapt to gathering size limitations and social distancing requirements, while providing the high-quality and affordable programming that is our hallmark.”

The large University of Massachusetts system, which has campuses in Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth, Lowell and Worcester,

has not announced its plans for the fall semester, and a spokesman for UMass President Marty Meehan said each of the UMass campuses will be making final plans available in the coming weeks.

The announcement came hours after state public health officials reported 271 new cases of COVID-19 and 36 new deaths, raising total reported infections in the state since the outbreak began to 106,422 and increasing the death toll to 7,770. COVID-19 hospitalizations, the seven-day average of the positive test rate and the three-day average of COVID-19 deaths continued to trend in downward in Massachusetts, but are rising in several southern and western states.

The state universities group said Phase 3 of Gov. Charlie Baker's economic reopening plan is "expected by mid-August," and said they plan to follow state and federal COVID-19 health and safety protocols and procedures. Gov. Baker, according to his own plan, could move the state into Phase 3 as soon as June 29.

The nine state universities said they are still accepting admission and residence hall applications through the summer, and will be releasing more detailed "safe return plans" in the coming days and weeks.

"We are hearing from our students a demand for the return to in-classroom instruction and a return to their on-campus housing," Pedone said. "Our students value the personal attention afforded them by our small class sizes and enjoy the residence life experience offered at all our state universities."

The state Board of Higher Education plans to meet on Tuesday at 10 a.m., with members participating remotely in a meeting accessible on Zoom.