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UW-Stout: Regional UW campuses announce shift to online instruction after Thanksgiving break

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Following the announcement of 100% capacity at area hospitals, along with the executive order issued by Gov. Tony Evers concerning the rise of COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin, three western Wisconsin regional UW campuses have decided to move to remote instruction after Thanksgiving break, the chancellors said in a joint statement.

“We all had high hopes of returning to campus after the fall break to continue our in-person classes,” said UW-Eau Claire Chancellor Jim Schmidt. “But with these two pieces of important information within a 24-hour period – it was a literal game-changer. Governor Evers’ recommendations to help mitigate the virus includes advising folks to stay home because – in his words – the crisis is urgent. In the spirit of public good requested by the governor we need to pull together to help keep as many people safe and at home during the remainder of the semester.”

“The health and safety of our faculty, staff and students are of the utmost importance,” said UW-Stout Chancellor Katherine Frank. “However, we live, work and play in our communities. When we have hospitals at full capacity, a sudden spike could overwhelm our local health care system, and we have to do whatever we can to prevent that.”

“Together as Western Wisconsin’s three regional campuses we all believe this is the right decision,” added Chancellor Connie Foster, UW-River Falls. “President Thompson encouraged us to work together as a region in making this decision, and we chancellors agree that this is the best approach.”

For those students, faculty and staff who wish to remain on campus for critical research and lab work, the buildings, residence halls, library, internet access and food services will remain open.

The chancellors emphasized that the announcement about campuses switching to remote instruction does not reflect a significant rise in cases among their students or employees, and it does not affect their operations for the spring 2021 semester.

“We understand that many students would like to return to campus and continue their studies, and that is a decision each and every student must make for themselves,” stated Schmidt. “Our campuses will be open for those students and faculty, and extra antigen testing will be administered. We plan to test students and employees on campus twice per week for the remaining weeks of the fall semester.”

All three campuses are in the far western portion of Wisconsin, including the cities of Eau Claire, Menomonie and River Falls.

“We have a duty to respond to the governor’s call to protect our state, and with making this move we’re doing just that,” said Foster.

Frank added, “I am genuinely proud of what we have accomplished as a university this semester. We have excelled under very difficult circumstances through our commitment to the health and safety of our campus and broader community.”

Details and information for each campus can be found at their websites, UW-Eau Claire, UW-River Falls and UW-Stout.