

A University of Mary Washington Update

This year has brought about many changes for students, families, and institutions of higher learning. As the global pandemic continues, economic pressures and significant movements for social change have been at the forefront of the national dialogue and in our hearts and on our minds here at Mary Washington.

Facing the Pandemic

Since March, our faculty and staff have demonstrated a true commitment to our students.

With four days' notice in March, faculty quickly moved from an in-person to an online environment to ensure our students completed their course requirements for the spring semester.

Faculty also helped higher education around the world. Professor John Broome in our College of Education saw a need for support and launched the “Higher Education Collective” on Facebook to connect faculty with basic and high-level remote-teaching tools. The result was a worldwide movement with more than 24,000 members in 100-plus countries that, hopefully, will continue to inspire educators to collaborate long after this pandemic has gone.

In June and July, more than 40 UMW faculty members participated in the COVID-19 IN CONTEXT course. In total, more than 1,900 students, alumni, and friends from around the globe enrolled in the free class. Voluntary donations raised over \$16,000 to help defray the cost of the course, and the extra funding was directed to student research and other experiential learning opportunities. UMW students were able to earn three credits at no cost, which was welcome news for financially pressed families.

UMW established a COVID TASK FORCE to research and prepare a plan to return to campus. Among more than 100 submissions, UMW’s plan was one of only two approved without revision by SCHEV (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia) and was used as a model by several other institutions of higher education.

UMW delayed fall move-in by three weeks and began all classes online to allow more time to obtain testing supplies and to learn from the experiences of our peer institutions. The Fredericksburg campus experience was reinvented – classrooms reconfigured, athletic conditioning modified, residence halls rearranged, dining options altered – all with a focus on slowing the spread of the virus and continuing to provide a transformative college experience.

Faculty spent the summer reimagining the “UMW experience” in new, student-centered ways to create engaging and challenging learning experiences. Courses were online, face-to-face, or a hybrid of the two. While forty percent included on-campus, in-classroom experiences, UMW was prepared to go fully remote at any time during the fall semester if conditions changed.

Throughout the semester, UMW students were diligent and responsible as they worked to protect themselves and each other. Their commitment to living as good citizens in this community has truly been outstanding. Students returned home on November 20 to finish the semester online. In total, there were only 47 reports of COVID-19 out of a population of over 4,300 students and 934 faculty and staff.

Student, alumni, and community activities and events shifted online with many new opportunities for engagement.

Although UMW canceled all sponsored international education programs, the pandemic did not halt cross-cultural learning at UMW. Many students continued their study abroad courses remotely. For example, Colin Wills took classes at Akita International University. This involved getting up at 2 a.m. eastern time to attend classes taught in Japanese.

Homecoming, Family Weekend, and other traditional events featured virtual tours, live online musical performances, panel discussions, and presentations. On-campus, students participated in socially distanced events such as scavenger hunts, a bonfire, a pumpkin carving contest, and service projects.



Community programs, such as Mary Talks, book clubs, museum lectures, art exhibits, and concerts, were viewed live online or enjoyed later. These events have drawn hundreds of alumni and friends who were previously prevented from participating because of geography, family demands, or other personal obstacles. The Great Lives lecture series will launch its 2021 season with eighteen virtual lectures to be followed by a live Q&A with virtual attendees.

Looking Forward

A January Term (or J-Term) will be offered remotely from January 4 to January 22, 2021. Spring classes will start on January 25 and continue through April 30, with Commencement tentatively scheduled for May 8.

The lessons learned this year have made us stronger, more resilient, and self-assured. New technologies and ways of teaching that enhance the student experience will undoubtedly become part of the very fabric of a Mary Washington education. Virtual programs that engage a global audience will also continue to thrive.

Your Support is Crucial

This academic year, endowed scholarships and other forms of private support are funding 396 scholarships and student programs totaling close to \$2 million. In these difficult times, we are grateful to have this invaluable source of student support.

The disruption caused by COVID-19 has cost the University millions of dollars in housing refunds and lost revenue. Families are experiencing unexpected loss of income and students are feeling heightened pressures and anxiety. CARES Act funding has helped tremendously, but the need continues to grow. We are thankful for the many donors who provided gifts to the SOS fund, Eagle Food and Resource Closet, Talley Counseling Center, First-in-Family Program, James Farmer Multicultural Center, and other programs that support underrepresented and vulnerable students.

With you by our side in even the most challenging times, UMW's future continues to be one of optimism and opportunity. Thank you!