Introduction

On March 8, 2021, Chancellor Gibson issued a communication aiming for a return to a full-campus experience for fall. Many details are being developed for employees and students to ensure a safe working and learning environment. As a residential university, students, families, and community members expect to see a vibrant, accessible campus this summer. Your role is critical in supporting such an expectation.

To accomplish this expectation to provide a dynamic residential university experience for our students, community, and one another, all offices will be staffed to a level to permit their being open during Standard Office Hours (as prescribed in UWSA SYS 1227 - Standard Office Hours, Legal Holidays and Other UW System Institution Closures) by June 1, 2021. This will require planning to ensure adequate staffing is available to accomplish this return to full operation. Exceptions to Standard Office Hours are made by the vice chancellor of that department or office. All employees will be completely returning to their original, pre-pandemic, contracted work locations by August 1, 2021. For further details on campus milestone details, reference Chancellor Gibson’s communication from April 6, 2021.

You may have started conversations with your employees (faculty, staff, and student employees) regarding what their return to the office will look like and how to manage customers and various daily activities/responsibilities. Use this guide to support your department’s updated return to UW-Stevens Point planning. We have provided these tools and resources to further our aspiration for the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to be valued
as an employer of choice as we move into the post-coronavirus world. While this information is mainly related to staff, certain aspects could be helpful for faculty planning as well.

Create Your Plan

Over this past year, many individuals continued to work fully or partially remotely. During this time, many improvements have been gained to the way work is completed and services are provided. As you assess how your department will provide future services, consider what has been learned and how to continue the growth towards a more productive, engaged, and inclusive campus.

Employee Considerations

Engage with employees in open conversations to assess what has been learned from working remotely and to determine what practices will continue upon return to UWSP. Discuss what practices can/should continue and why. Some examples below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Action to Continue</th>
<th>Example Reason to Continue</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some or all virtual meetings</td>
<td>Improves inclusive attendance because everyone can hear and/or participate effectively in the meeting, allows for transcripts and/or recordings, and can decrease opportunities for the spread of pathogens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book longer meeting 5 minutes after the hours and for only 45 – 55 minutes versus an hour.</td>
<td>Allows for bio breaks, a small wellness/refresh activity, a few minutes to check emails, and supports individuals’ abilities to attend successive meetings on time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book shorter meetings for 20 – 25 minutes versus 30 minutes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid office hours (faculty and instructional staff); offer some office hours virtually.</td>
<td>Support student needs and success.</td>
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2 Discuss trends within your discipline, function, and/or program to continue building excellence both internally and for those you serve.
Discuss the benefits of returning to UW-Stevens Point. Focus on the department, role, and individual benefits, some examples are below. Remind your team of the value they bring to the in-person experience and even in serving the needs of other offices and departments as well as students.

- Review and address individual and group risk factors.
  - Discuss continued strategies to maximize safety. Also see Office Space Considerations.
  - Fully vaccinated employees who work at a UWSP location will continue to follow campus guidelines for face coverings, daily symptom screening tool, and/or COVID testing, but they are now exempted from testing and quarantine as long as they are not showing COVID symptoms. Reference the most recent UWSP guidelines available via the UWSP Coronavirus website, UWSP guidance aligns with the CDC Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People which is updated as new information becomes available.
  - Encourage individuals, as appropriate, to get vaccinated sooner rather than later since all employees at UW-Stevens Point are eligible now for vaccination. All adults over 16 are eligible to be vaccinated beginning on April 5, 2021. Consider fully vaccinated timelines for employee return. If someone is not getting vaccinated, you may share the information from Center for Disease Control Key Things to Know about COVID-19 Vaccines, Myths and Facts, and Benefits of Getting Vaccinated.
  - Please remember that UWSP is not mandating vaccination. If an employee declines vaccination, respect their decision but note that it will not be a reason to continue remote work and should not factor into your staffing decisions during this transition period.
  - Some employees may still have concerns due to elevated risk for themselves.
    - Discuss these concerns to facilitate effective planning to return.
    - DO NOT attempt to identify and/or target employees who may be in the Centers for Disease Control and

If you need assistance to navigate returning to UWSP needs, contact Human Resources at hr@uwsp.edu.
Prevention (CDC’s) high-risk categories. If an employee voluntarily discloses information, keep it confidential.

- Plan for this return in a manner that will maximize the safety of your team.
- Refer employees Human Resources COVID-19 page for life-work balance resources and to the Employee Assistance Program if they need tips or guidance on transitioning back to UW-Stevens Point or general support.

Discuss needed preparations (department or individual conversations based on topic).

Examples:
- If continuing with virtual meetings: microphones, speakers, and web camera verifications and/or needs.
- Employee parking lot pass needs.
- Individual personal preparations (i.e., daycare, eldercare, or pet care).

Discuss current and summer schedules with your student employees.

Create an updated departmental return to UW-Stevens Point timeline and share with the department and your vice chancellor before finalizing.

**Work Modification versus Accommodation Considerations**

Again, effective listening, empathy, and flexibility are key to successful leadership. Returning to campuses will result in mixed feelings. There will be feelings of loss, as we have become accustomed to working remotely and it is familiar to us. That remote work allowed us to do things we could not have done before, but it also allowed each of us to grow professionally in how we serve our customers.

However, returning to campuses will also be a relief and should be something that we want to celebrate. The psychological trauma and isolation that came from the pandemic is real. Let’s be sure to support one another as we make the change into the vibrant, residential, community-serving university that brings value to the work each of us does.

**Work Modification**

Most commonly, employee requests or discussions around their needs will be for work modifications. A modification can be implemented without a lawfully protected disability or religious status requirement if it meets the needs of the department and does not compromise the ability to adequately staff the office(s) and provide face-to-face services to our university
community. Such a modification is a request you would/could grant for anyone/everyone in the department. A basic example of a work modification is ergonomic workstation materials.

**Work Accommodation**

In some situations, an employee may share with you that their request is based on their disability status. This is a situation in which an accommodation may need to be reviewed by you and Human Resources. We are here to work through that process with your employee.

**Do not** ask or require an employee to share the medical reasons behind a work-related request. Instead, discuss their request, if it can be accomplished consistently for anyone within the department (a.k.a. a work modification), then coordinate to provide it. If the request is beyond what would be defined as a work modification, tell the employee that the request will take a more detailed review. If they believe they need an accommodation due to a disability, they should contact Human Resources. For additional information view the [Medical Compliance Quick Reference Guide for Leadership](#) and the [HR Americans with Disabilities Act page](#).

Follow-up with your employee once you have been able to review their request completely. If you cannot approve the request, let them know that and reiterate the accommodation request process as noted above.

**Needing Time Away**

Individuals may still need time away related to COVID. Refer to the *Needing Time Away from Work* section of the [HR Coronavirus page](#) to support the management of time away. Notable reminders are listed below.

- The use of sick leave to care for an individual’s child due to closures will end effective June 30, 2021.

**Office Space Considerations**

- Ensure the office or remote space has the necessary resources for employees to work effectively.
  - Review and reshare the [Pivot Point Appendices](#) for additional workspace information, including water fountain, coffee maker, etc. guidance.
- Reorganize or create alternative workstations where possible per CDC guidance of six feet of physical distance. Remove excessive furniture where possible.
- Encourage single occupancy in work rooms.
- Procure sufficient disinfectant products and cleaning supplies so employees can frequently clean their own workspaces.
Customer Service Considerations

- Determine additional/updated needs for barrier/shields on desks.
- Update signage and visual indicators of distance (markers on floors, signs providing direction for visitors, designating traffic flow in/out of area).
- Schedule appointments, if appropriate, as much as possible (minimizing unexpected traffic into offices and creating space between in-person visits). Have a plan to communicate with drop-in visitors to request that they make an appointment if able to do so.
- Remove high-touch items (brochures, pamphlets, common pens, etc.). If certain items are necessary for customer service, create a plan to provide in a manner which minimizes touching and ensures sanitizing for returned items, such as a pen per CDC guidance.
- Provide customers, partners/contractors, etc. with communication on our expectations to protect campus. Reference the communication materials available on the UW-Stevens Point Coronavirus website.

Once you have created your department’s plan for return, share it with your direct supervisor.

As Employees Return to a UWSP Location

As a Supervisor/Manager:

- Ensure employees continue with Daily Symptom Screening. See the Daily Symptom Screening Guide for Supervisors.
  - Even if vaccinated, the screening must still be completed.
  - Supervisors will review the daily screenings to ensure that they are still being completed and need to communicate expectations clearly to any employee that is not completing their screening.
- Remind employees to prevent the spread of germs when they are feeling ill and permit remote work if possible or ask them to take the appropriate leave (See Needing Time Away from Work section of the HR Coronavirus page).
- Conduct daily or weekly check-ins.
  - Address questions, issues, provide and receive feedback timely, and maintain interpersonal relationships.
  - Discuss challenges and support with resources or remove barriers for all employees.
  - Support and/or clarify meaning, value, and purpose in work; ensure work is connected to UWSP mission and vision and be willing to celebrate the togetherness and end to isolation with your team.
- Build in time for social/networking and team building to support belonging.
- Be flexible with expectations and allow time for employees to get used to returning to the office. Be prepared to support flexibility related requests or find win-win outcomes.
• Appreciate **all** employees for their contributions and accomplishments in the manner they prefer to be appreciated/acknowledged.

• Facilitate conversations within the department to create equitable work schedules and expectations.
  o Don’t rely on your department to just “work things out”. Yes, giving them room to negotiate with one another can be helpful, but watch out for those who may take advantage of others willingness to make it work.
  o As with before the pandemic there will be members who are willing to be flexible and others who are less willing. Ensure you support the process and give structure to balance the needs of all.

• Empathize and support your employees’ wellbeing.
  o Ask them how they are doing, in general, take time to talk about non-work-related items, and/or encourage self-care activities. Refer them to life-work balance and wellness resources.

• Provide synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for information sharing and communication. Keep your team on the same page and communicate openly.

• Communicate changes and communicate/reassure what isn’t changing to support stability and reduce uncertainty.

• Re-emphasize expectations for professionalism and conflict management. Colleagues may need to get used to being around each other again. Thus, foundational reminders/expectations can support the transition.

• Be mindful of your emotions.
  o Reflect if you start feeling agitated or stressed; take a moment for wellness and de-stress.
  o Again, employees will need time to readjust and may also be stressed. Bumps should be treated as learning opportunities and in some situations may mean adjustments to “the plan.”

Finally, the return to campuses should be a positive experience. There are the obstacles and apprehensions that we’ve discussed. But please remember that you and your team are crucial to the success and the future of UWSP. Your efforts result in students thriving in their academic journey. It is each employee who can take pride in every commencement, joy in each activity and event, delight in the completed projects, and pleasure in our charming strolls across these picturesque campuses, reserves, and field stations.

Our communities also need us to achieve their goals and aspirations. There will be conferences, weddings, receptions, explorations, meetings, and so much more that builds the many communities around our various facilities. We have sizable facilities in five counties that are relying on us to be open and ready to bring our economic impact into these regions. You and your team are crucial to accomplishing this for our friends and neighbors.
References:

Some of this guide is adapted from information obtained from Kent State University, University of California-San Diego, and UW-Superior.


