

Coverage of the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic

During the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, UW-Stout closed the campus in favor of virtual teaching methods. When we received the news, I wrote "No Cases-No Classes" and published it that night.

I attended various Stout Student Association meetings to see how they would be reorganizing and wrote a story on my findings. I worked behind the scenes with Deon Canon, SSA president, to help host the SSA virtual meetings publicly.

See my stories below.

No Cases—No Classes: UW-Stout Moves Face-To-Face Courses Online Amidst COVID-19 Concerns

BRYCE PARR



University of Wisconsin—Stout Chancellor Katherine P. Frank stated in a campus wide email that classes and various campus events will not be meeting face-to-face after spring break. Starting March 23 and continuing through April 5, classes will use alternative methods of delivery as a COVID-19 control measure. The news comes after the World Health Organization declared the spread of COVID-19 a pandemic earlier today.

According to the email, there have been no confirmed cases of the virus on UW—Stout's campus, in Menomonie or in Dunn County. Student organization meetings and many campus events will also be canceled from March 15 to April 5.

Senior biology lecturer Arthur Kneeland commented on the decision. "I think that this is a better decision than a lot of schools are making, where they cancel face-to-face for the rest of the semester. Don't get me wrong—this is going to suck. Teaching online is my absolute least favorite thing," Kneeland said. He believes the decision will allow for individuals exposed to the virus to be identified and isolated after returning from spring break.

Some students express concern over the effectiveness of online instruction for courses that were designed to be face-to-face. "A lot of teachers are not going to be able to do much because they were not prepared for an online class," said freshman early childhood education major Jackie Moore. "A lot of kids in my classes are freaking out about labs. How can you make that up?"

Graduate students share this sentiment. M.S. in food science and technology student Kristen Teupel has finished her graduate research but says her peers might have more difficulty. "They might not have time to get all the data they need. I doubt they'll let us into the labs." said Teupel.



UW—Stout's performing arts department also feels the pressure. The upcoming musical "Godspell" has been cancelled with tentative plans to reschedule, and according to freshman concert band member and applied science major Megan Koester, UW-Stout's concert band might not be able to prepare for their upcoming spring concert if the class changes are extended. "If they cancel the entire semester that would mean that we can't go on tour or play our concerts. We wouldn't be able to practice at all," Koester said.

Although students and faculty are concerned about the academic implications, many believe that the policy is a good idea. "I'd rather be safe than sorry. On campus, we have people of all ages, and you never know if one of them might not have the best immune system," said Moore.



She is also worried that the dorms will be a breeding ground for the virus. "The girls in my dorm refuse to wash their hands, and I woke up in the middle of the night throwing up. That's what I'm most concerned about," said Moore.

Kneeland is also concerned that some students will celebrate the cancellation of classes by visiting bars the Sunday they return. Students may not realize they have been infected and "spread the infection to like-minded revelers" said Kneeland.

Kneeland recommends seeking refunds for travel plans and travelling after the virus situation dies down. "Stay home for spring break. Stay safe and wait until after the crisis to spend that money on an awesome trip," he said. "Don't go visit your grandparents after coming back from wherever you went for break. They are the most important group to give social distance due to the drastically higher mortality rate of the elderly."

Orgs in Disorder

BRYCE PARR



The recent closure of campus facilities and cancellation of events left many University of Wisconsin—Stout student organizations without a way to conduct business. According to Darrin Witucki, Student Center Director and SSA advisor, 221 events were canceled in the two weeks following spring break—including 203 student organization meetings—and the Stout Student Association (SSA) was no exception.

As the SSA works to set their own procedures for the unique campus closure, SSA President Deon Canon said they plan to share their ideas with other student organizations after spring break. “Be able to adapt. No matter how patient you are—you are going to run into problems,” said Canon. “This is a great opportunity to try new things for your orgs.”

According to Witucki, UW-Stout’s 50th Student Congress is the first to witness a pandemic closure in SSA’s history.

In order to continue serving the UW-Stout student body under the authority of Wisconsin State Statute 36.09(5), the SSA must continue to operate according to their constitution. However, the SSA constitution—like most student organizations—has no bylaws concerning a campus closure in the event of a global pandemic. “SSA can’t be put on hold. We need alternatives to meetings,” Canon said.

The SSA is currently exploring virtual meeting options like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Many professors were also urged to utilize Microsoft Teams—a system UW-Stout students have access to. The SSA recommends that organizations try adapting Robert’s Rules of Order, a meeting governance system used in parliamentary procedure, to an online meeting environment.

“we have had nothing but positive responses and understanding from all of our reservation groups: external clients, departments, and student orgs,” Witucki said. “We move forward the best we can, and we hope for the best.”

