



## COLLEGE OF THE ATLANTIC

Office of the President

December 15, 2020

Dear All,

As I write this message, tens of thousands of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine doses are being loaded into a FedEx cold-storage van for distribution throughout our state. A total of 300 vials (150 doses) will find their way to 10 Wayman Lane, the Mount Desert Island Hospital, and into the bloodstreams of our local health and emergency workers. Thus begins the largest vaccination mobilization the world has ever seen.

The road toward herd immunity is long. Many months of mask wearing, physical distancing, and frequent handwashing lie between now and a time of pre-COVID behavioral norms. That said, despite the very troubling increases in case numbers and deaths across the country and the globe, it's hard not to see a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel.

Amidst this juxtaposition of good and bad news, we will open the College of the Atlantic campus for an in-person winter term this January. While welcoming all students, staff, and faculty to return to campus, I am—as in the fall—allowing everyone the flexibility to make their own decisions about whether or not to be physically present at 105 Eden Street. We must all make the choices that are best for us and for our families, and I believe that faculty, staff, and students have the creative capacities to make winter term successful by combining in-person and remote teaching, learning, and working.

For those of you who will be studying remotely this winter, I'm humbled by your commitment to learning and to COA, and we pledge to continue to work with you to create community remotely. I call on those of us here on campus to keep our remote community members in mind and in the fold as much as we can—whether in small groups and chats online, one-on-one conversations, or through larger campus events. We can, and must, make that inclusion central to winter term.

Living, working, and studying through COVID-19 is and has always been a consideration of risk and reward. I know that there are options, such as holding a 100% remote term, that carry less risk, but believe it is our place to enable learning environments that provide flexibility and opportunities for success, and those include a vibrant, in-person option. Working with COA's COVID-19 response team, the practitioners at the MDI hospital, and colleagues at institutions throughout Maine, I believe it's worth the risk to keep our campus open. Here's why:

- Flexibility provides safety to the most at-risk faculty, staff, and students.
- Our success during the fall is a good, if imperfect, indicator of how we should fare in winter.



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- Our testing protocols should help stifle the spread of the virus should it find its way onto campus.
- There's been little evidence of community transmission at schools; instead, the virus tends to come to campuses after large, ill-advised gatherings—and such gatherings are rare here.
- Despite rising numbers, cases are still relatively low in Maine and here in Hancock County—if we can get folks here safely and test appropriately, we have a very good chance of making it through the term with low instances and transmissions.
- We have a community, both on campus and here in Bar Harbor, that's clearly dedicated to the kind of behavior (masking, distancing, handwashing) that reduce the chances of infections.
- We have no organized athletics, Greek life, or large dormitories that can facilitate the transmission of the virus.
- We have a determined and committed Buildings and Grounds team that has organized spaces in a way to minimize close contact and that keeps those places disinfected.
- We have the space to isolate and quarantine individuals should they become infected or exposed, and appropriate plans for addressing positive cases and exposures.

I have walked through our plans with other colleges throughout the state. Although some colleges, notably Bates, will delay the opening of their on-campus term until February, others, including those in more densely populated regions of the state, are starting their terms on schedule as in years past. I have engaged with hospital administrators and medical experts and have walked through our protocols and plans. They are supportive of our decision to provide in-person teaching, just as they are for the island's public schools, and view us as a model institution for our approach to COVID-19. Of course, the State of Maine has the authority to move schools to 100% remote learning and, should that mandate be made, we will pivot appropriately. But I hope it doesn't come to that.

Week one of winter term 2021 begins January 4. All students who will be studying here in Bar Harbor, living both on and off campus, should return by then. During week one of the term, we'll facilitate COVID-19 testing for everyone, and that first week of classes will be conducted entirely online. **For those of you joining us in person: one of the very best things you can do right now to contribute to a successful start of the term is to quarantine at home for the next couple of weeks before your return.** If you cannot do so, please wear a mask, keep physical distancing as much as possible, and try to avoid indoor gatherings. If you are able to get a COVID-19 test in the days prior to your return, please do so.



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Keep an eye out for emails from Sarah Luke and others in the coming days with important information about the beginning of the term and updates to our Safe Campus Plan. We'll be posting updates at [coa.edu/covid19](https://coa.edu/covid19) as well.

Let's hold these two things in our sights simultaneously: the need to be vigilant about protecting ourselves and our community, and the vision of that light that is a nearing end to these difficult times. I miss seeing all of you, even if it's behind a mask and at a distance.

Yours,

Darron Collins '92  
President, College of the Atlantic