

To FIMS Graduate and Undergraduate Students,

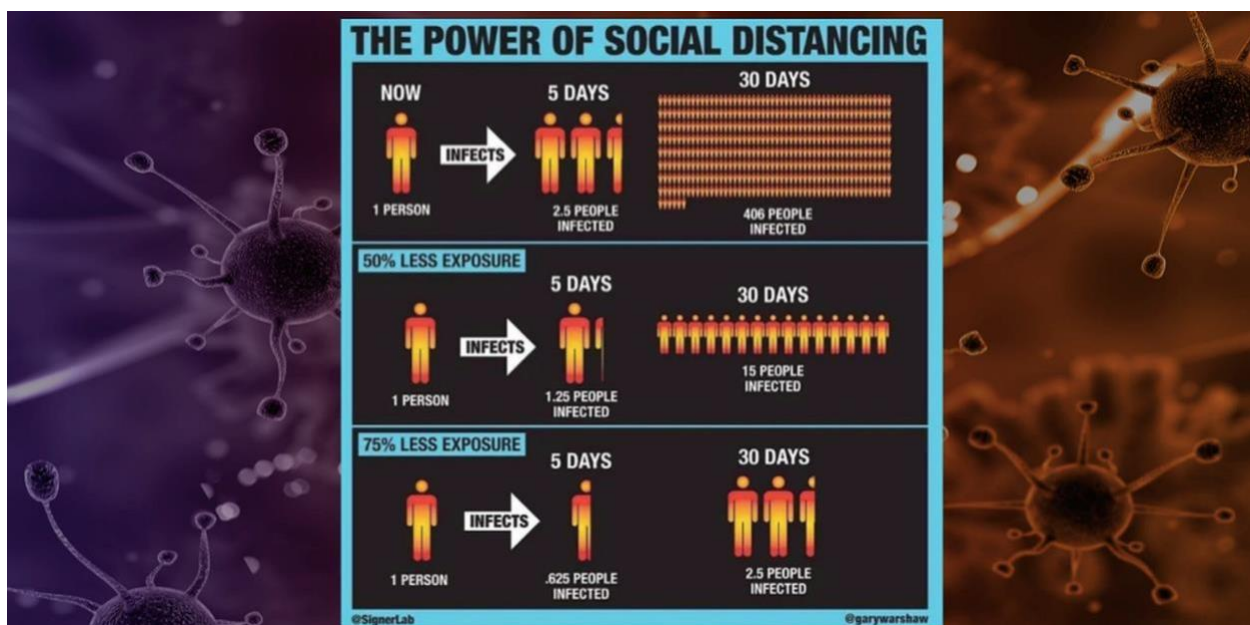
I write from home; like most of you, I am keeping social distance and like some of you I'm spending a lot of time on Zoom.

I miss you, and I am not alone. Your instructors miss you, staff across campus miss you, and I know you miss each other. I love seeing the FNB Atrium, the Creative Commons and FIMSSC office, our graduate offices, labs, Grad Library, lounges, and study nooks full of students attached to laptops and books, buds in and headsets on, plastic containers full of carrot sticks open on the tables beside your work. (Yes, I have seen carrot sticks.) The light streams in and the energy is lively and peaceful.

I arrived as FIMS' new Dean a little over a year ago. In that short time, I have been moved by the qualities of engagement, depth, critical ability, and intellectual creativity of undergraduate and graduate students. It is a glorious place to be, and you make it that way. For those of you soon to graduate, I recognize the warp speed swerve you've endured these last two weeks and the uncertainty you face. Know that you have educated yourselves beautifully and we're proud to have a role in that. You have equipped yourselves to move bravely forward, and we are cheering you every step of the way. At this most unexpected time, we applaud your kindness and resilience and we stand with you.

Today, I want to communicate a message about focussing on priorities. **The TLDR version:** protect your health, keep learning and stay abreast of your courses so that we can complete the semester, keep in touch with your instructors, use Western's on-line resources, and especially, keep the faith in your educations, your achievements, and your futures.

The first priority is your health. As you've heard, to protect yourself, your friends, your family members and your community, it is critically important that you maintain social distance (e.g., 6 feet apart, even from the people you live with if you are ill). Social distance is not a myth. Here's a graphic from Dr. Davy C.H. Cheng, Dean of the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, which makes it plain: the less contact we all have, the fewer people will be infected, the sooner we will flatten the curve.



Beyond social distancing, you've all seen the list of key practices for protecting your health. Wash your hands and use sanitizer where you can't handwash. Train yourself to not touch your face with unsanitized hands when you're away from home (wearing a non-medical mask or headband on your face can help you develop the habit). Here's the list from the Middlesex London Health Unit:

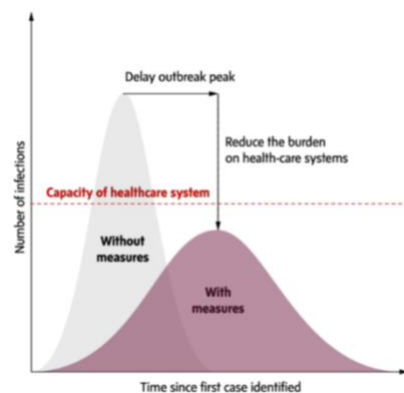


The poster features the ML logo and the text 'BUREAU DE SANTÉ DE MIDDLESEX-LONDON HEALTH UNIT' and 'www.healthunit.com'. The main title is 'Prevent the spread of COVID-19'. Below the title is a list of seven prevention measures, each preceded by a checkmark icon.

- ✓ Stay six feet away from others (physical distancing)
- ✓ Avoid all non-essential gatherings of any size
- ✓ Stay home from work and other activities if you are sick
- ✓ Self-isolate for 14 days if you have travelled outside Canada recently
- ✓ Wash your hands with soap and water frequently (at least 20 seconds)
- ✓ Cover coughs and/or sneezes with your sleeve or cough into your elbow
- ✓ Clean and disinfect high-touch areas frequently

Western, the City of London, the Province of Ontario, and Canada are acting pre-emptively to protect citizens as early as possible from the COVID-19 pandemic. We can't stop the Coronavirus from moving into a region, but we can use the public health and medical wisdom of affected parts of the world to slow down the rate of infection and preserve our health system's capacity for treating people. Health will be an enormous team effort in the weeks to come, from persons to households, communities, and nations. Here's the key point: this is something we can *do*, an effort we can join from our own apartments or dorm rooms or living arrangements wherever we are.

Here's the best graphic I've found about the difference prevention makes, from the *Globe and Mail*. The purple segment (compared to the grey) is what is meant by "flattening the curve."



Mental Health Care: If you don't usually have to think too much about your physical health, doing so now may take a toll on your mental health. (The whole situation is a strain on our mental health.) Can you use support? Start at Western's new Remote Student Experience website, with lots of resources, places to book an on-line mental health appointment, sleep apps and more. It's being updated all the time and you can find it here:

<https://studentexperience.uwo.ca/remote/>

Finishing your terms and degrees: Your FIMS and other Western instructors are doing everything humanly possible to ensure that you can finish your courses and degrees this term, from migrating course materials, lectures and assignments on-line to adjusting grade weights and options, to individual consultations where they help. Please be in touch with your instructors if you have concerns and see the University's recently announced Pass/Fail/Withdrawal option after final grades are available.

<https://www.registrar.uwo.ca/updates.html>

FIMS Academic Support: We also invite undergraduates to be in touch with FIMS Undergraduate Student Services, and we know many of you have already been in touch. FIMS academic counsellors are available for audio or video appointments to discuss program planning, extenuating circumstances, and decisions related to course withdrawal. You can book an appointment by contacting fims@uwo.ca.

FIMS Graduate students have been regularly in touch with Graduate Student Services, but if you have questions, please email Associate Dean Graduate Sharon Sliwinski at ssliwins@uwo.ca.

On-line Learning: As your teachers change their modes of course delivery, you have changed your approaches to learning and studying, which is demanding. (It seems hard because it is hard.) Have you figured out the strategies that best enable you to work with course material on-line? A little bit at a time? Long stretches? Communication with classmates? Mixing off-line modes (like reading books) and on-line? Early in the day or late? Finding the rhythms that work best under the circumstances may help, and again, please stay in touch with your teachers. Our goal is for everyone to make it across the Winter 2020 finish line. You can find on-line learning support here:

<https://studentexperience.uwo.ca/remote/academic-and-learning-support.html>

Financial Support for Graduate Students: The University and FIMS (along with other Faculties) are developing a plan, which will be announced soon. Please stay tuned.

To sign off this time, here's "The Weight," a song by Robbie Robertson, guitarist, member of The Band, Indigenous Canadian who grew up in his early years at his mother's childhood home at the Six Nations Reserve, barely an hour from London. On the song's 50th anniversary last year, Robertson was joined by musicians and vocalists from all over the world. I hope you enjoy it.

[The Weight](#)

Everyone, be kind, be strong, and know that in taking care of ourselves we are taking care of each other.

Lisa Henderson
Dean