

CORONAVIRUS

DISRUPTIONS ESCALATE

INSIDE
HIGHER ED

A compilation examining the most important issues facing higher education boards and administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic, drawn from *Inside Higher Ed's* best work in April 2020.

Editor's Letter

What difference does a month make?

The major contours of the coronavirus pandemic's impact on colleges and universities haven't shifted in the last month. But that's not a sign of a stagnant situation. It's a reflection of a deepening crisis.

This is the second coronavirus-focused compilation of time-sensitive news and opinion *Inside Higher Ed* has published since the pandemic burst onto the scene this year. The first spanned Feb. 25 to March 25. During that period, colleges and universities across the country sent students home for the remainder of the spring semester and were working to refund room and board fees.

Faculty members grappled with a sudden shift to remote learning. Admissions officers worried about a rocky spring deposit season. Fears mounted that students, particularly first-generation and low-income students, would be disproportionately affected by the unfolding changes. Experts were suggesting scenario planning as a way for campuses to prepare for an uncertain future.

This new compilation, which contains articles and opinion pieces from the month of April, makes clear how much more difficult the situation has become. Financial challenges exploded into full-on lawsuits, furloughs and layoffs. Admissions season is proving to be even more unsettled than initially anticipated as uncertainty lingers over whether students will be allowed back on campus in the fall. And despite everyone's best efforts, horror stories cropped up as faculty members and students dealt with a patchwork of technological solutions for remote learning.

When I made selections for this booklet, it quickly became clear that many pieces of good work would have to be left on the cutting-room floor. Our reporters simply did too much good writing in the past month to pack it all into a booklet that is intended to provide leaders whose time is important with a succinct set of articles most relevant to the coronavirus crisis.

Please remember as you read this booklet that all work is being presented with minimal editing from the form in which it originally ran on our website and that some graphical elements may have been removed or changed for simplicity of presentation. This allows us to republish pieces in a new format as quickly as possible. It also allows this booklet to stand as a snapshot of where we have been that exposes enduring themes that must still be addressed. Read items with an eye toward the original publication dates, which are listed, and remember that specific details may have changed.

If you seek additional news and information, please visit our website, where our reporters continue to provide some of the best news and analysis available. In addition to our daily email newsletter, we've been posting live coronavirus-related updates throughout the day. We supplement our news coverage with excellent opinion pieces, webcasts and outreach to our readers. Looking forward, I have no doubt we'll be doing much more on college finances, decision making and the fast-evolving admissions season.

Thank you for turning to us as a source of information and insight in these difficult times. And thank you to our reporters and staff members for their persistent dedication and professionalism under trying circumstances.

Sincerely,

Rick Seltzer

Projects editor, *Inside Higher Ed*

Table of Contents

Editor's Letter	2
Table of Contents	3
Strategy and Planning	4
Opinion: 15 Fall Scenarios	5
Laying Groundwork for Fall, With or Without a Pandemic	8
What Do Fall Reopening Plans Mean Amid This Much Uncertainty?	11
Decision Points Loom for College Leaders	14
Rethinking the Academic Calendar	19
Important Data	21
Out of Work, Uncertain About the Future	22
Degrees of Separation	24
Low-Income Students Top Presidents' COVID-19 Worry List	26
Admissions and Finance	31
Here Come the Furloughs	32
Students Turn to Courts for Refunds	34
Pricing Pressures Escalate	37
Students	42
Accessibility Suffers During Pandemic	43
Students Remaining on Campus See 'A Ghost Town'	46
How Will Pass/Fail Affect Students' Future?	49
Teaching and Faculty	52
'Zoombies' Take Over Online Classrooms	53
When Professors Get Sick	56
Adjusting to Remote Instruction at Community Colleges	58
Synchronous Instruction Is Hot Right Now, but Is It Sustainable?	62

STRATEGY AND PLANNING

Key Takeaways:

- Leaders must balance their own institutions' needs -- financial, logistical and otherwise -- against safety and the larger risks of placing students in a potentially dangerous situation.
- A dizzying number of variables are involved in decisions about opening campus for the fall, from living arrangements to class size limitations, from cash flow concerns to the ages and vulnerability levels of staff members.
- Scenario planning continues to offer a useful framework for leaders to plan for different contingencies when the environment is changing quickly.
- The exact number of scenarios that should be considered varies by institution.
- At some point, scenario planning must give way to action. Decision points can be based on key dates, new information, choices by state or local leaders, and the amount of time needed to turn certain scenarios into reality.
- Political considerations are real. The choices available in a state or locality where a stay-at-home order has not been lifted are different from those available in one that has reopened.
- Choices made by public officials don't excuse campus leaders from the responsibility of needing to make the best decisions for their students, employees and surrounding regions.
- Even after a decision is made, it's risky to commit to the full fall semester on campus. Some suggest a "toggle" semester that would be partially online and partially in person.
- Institutions telegraphing a decision about the fall before enough information is available may actually be motivated by encouraging students to commit to attending -- and may be unintentionally signaling desperation to the market.
- Location appeared to be an early indicator for messaging differences, with institutions in less dense parts of the country sending different signals than those in urban areas. It's possible political affiliation of different regions played a part as well.

Opinion: 15 Fall Scenarios

| Higher education in a time of social distancing.

By **Edward J. Maloney and Joshua Kim** // April 22, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/YESTOCK

It's difficult to imagine higher education facing a more intense set of challenges than what we are seeing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges will likely be felt for years to come, but fall 2020 will test many of the standards and structures that we have come to associate with higher education.

While no one can foresee what will happen in the fall, most colleges and universities are thinking through a range of options. These options tend to fall along a continuum, with everything being back to normal on one end and fully remote learning on the other. The former is mostly outside the control of most institutions and the latter an option that many would rather not choose, at least not yet. In between is where it gets complicated.

Here are 15 scenarios for the fall that we think schools will be considering.

1. Back to Normal

In this scenario, the fall semester looks like any other fall semester. Residential students return to campus; commuting students participate in classes on campus as usual. All co-curricular and curricular activities pick up as usual. Life is back to normal, perhaps (hopefully) with some lessons learned from the upheaval of the spring about the importance of investments in teaching and learning support.

2. A Late Start

One possibility for the fall is that colleges and universities begin the semester later than usual, perhaps sometime in October or even early November, whenever the social distancing restrictions can accommodate students gathering together in classes on campus. Schools may choose to start online and then pick up face-to-face slightly later in the semester, or they may postpone the start of the semester until there

is a vaccine, better testing or a clear turning point in our fight against the ongoing spread of COVID-19.

3. Moving Fall to Spring

While under the previous scenario the fall semester would start late, it still assumes a fall semester would take place within the boundaries of the normal fall semester. In this scenario, the fall semester would be postponed until January 2021. From there, schools might choose to push back the spring semester to the summer, or push through a modified calendar to make spring and a much shorter summer session possible. This is a drastic step, but it is one that some colleges are actively considering as part of their fall planning.

4. First-Year Intensive

How a student begins their college experience may be the best predictor of how their college experience will end. The ability of a student to persist through the rigors

Opinion: 15 Fall Scenarios (cont.)

of college life is in part dependent on the quality of the support they receive in orienting to the independence and intensity of college-level work. Recognizing the importance of the first year and the first few weeks and months of the transition to college, this plan brings only first-year students to campus in the fall. First-year students learn in residential classes, while also participating in a full range of campus-based orientation and social-connecting exercises. Sophomores, juniors and seniors continue to learn remotely for the fall semester.

5. Graduate Students Only

Like the first-year intensive model, this approach would identify select student populations for return to campus. In this model, a smaller population of graduate students might return to campus to continue studies and to help with research continuity. There are other ways of identifying student populations – by school, by major, by class – that could also be combined with curricular and administrative considerations such as class size and need for face-to-face interaction.

6. Structured Gap Year

Many colleges and universities have extensive study abroad and gap year options. While study abroad will still likely be a challenge in the fall, one approach to creating a lower-density model for the fall would be to implement a broader-scale approach to gap year experiences. Students could propose project-based experiences that could be implemented and managed while social distancing rules are still in place. This model would depend heavily on whether options for students to make the gap year a meaningful experience are available given social distancing restrictions.

7. Targeted Curriculum

One approach option for fall is

to reduce the number of courses being offered to limit on campus density and to prioritize support resources. Schools are considering a variety of ways of doing this, including focusing on core courses or signature experience courses, eliminating low-enrollment courses, and prioritizing courses that can be more easily adapted to multiple modalities. Courses that are not part of the targeted pool are taught online.

8. Split Curriculum

In a split curriculum scenario, courses are designed as either residential or online. Students who are able to come back to campus (up to the population in which social distancing rules can be enforced) can choose to enroll in either format. Requiring a defined proportion of enrollments to be in online courses for residential students may increase the number of students that can return to campus. This scenario has the advantage of simplifying the course-development process for faculty and the course-selection process for students, while also running the maximum number of residential courses possible while adhering to social distancing guidelines.

9. A Block Plan

This scenario mimics what some colleges already do. Students would take one course at a time during much shorter (three or four weeks) sessions or blocks, run consecutively for the entire semester. The advantage, besides an interesting and intensive pedagogy, is flexibility. If something were to change in the situation related to the pandemic, such as a new second wave of infections, schools could more easily pivot to remote or face-to-face learning at breaks between blocks.

10. Modularity

The block plan is a dramatic de-

parture from the normal curricular structure at most schools. It would likely require a full rethinking of the curriculum, teaching practice and administrative processes. Moving to a more modular course model might be more attractive and more easily implementable within existing structures. Courses could be structured in a variety of ways that would be consistent with the mission and signature strengths of the institution. At one institution, students might take five course modules over seven and a half weeks and then switch to a different five courses. Or students might take a semester-long seminar in their major with shorter modules for electives and labs.

11. Students in Residence, Learning Virtually

Much like the model of Minerva Schools at KGI, this approach would bring students back to campus, perhaps at a slightly less dense rate, while still teaching courses in a virtual environment. Students would be able to take advantage of many co-curricular activities that were set up for effective social distancing, but classes, where the correct density of students sitting for long periods of time in a room is still a relative unknown, would be taught online.

12. A Low-Residency Model

In this model, similar to how many online and executive programs work now, students would come to campus for intensive face-to-face experiences and then return home to complete the semester online. Students would be brought to campus in iterative waves. This would allow for greater density control. Rich face-to-face pedagogical experiences with peers and faculty could be developed while still maintaining social distancing. The online part of the semester would

Opinion: 15 Fall Scenarios (cont.)

be enhanced by student familiarity with each other.

13. A HyFlex model

The HyFlex model is perhaps the most flexible and for many will be the most attractive. It is also possibly one of the more difficult approaches for faculty. In this model, courses would be taught both face-to-face and online by the same instructor at the same time. Students could choose to return to campus or stay home. Those on campus could be assigned certain class slots when face-to-face is an option, allowing the schools greater control of social distancing in the classroom. This model tends to privilege synchronous learning, and to do it well often requires real-time in-class help (a TA or course assistant to manage the online students), an intentionally designed classroom and a great deal of patience from both the students and faculty.

14. A Modified Tutorial Model

Another approach that gives students and the university a great deal of flexibility is a modified tutorial model. In this model, students would take a common online lecture session. Faculty and or TAs

would then meet with small groups of students in tutorials that would allow for social distancing to be employed. Unlike the HyFlex model, a modified tutorial model does not require additional in-class support to manage the technology. The disadvantage is that it asks more of a faculty member's time to be dedicated to meeting with students.

15. Fully Remote

Perhaps the most obvious option for the fall is to continue doing what we've been doing this spring. Students would be taught in a virtual environment from wherever they happen to be. Successes from this spring could be carried over to the fall, and lessons learned could be employed. Co-curricular activities would be a challenge, but student groups and many activities could be carried forward online, if only temporarily.

These models are not all distinct, and many overlap. Each brings with it nuances and opportunities for modification and creative solutions unique to a specific campus. Many will require highly adaptable faculty committed to marrying synchronous and asynchronous learning in

flexible, dynamic ways.

Additionally, all of these options may not be completely feasible at any one institution, but all may turn out to be necessary thought experiments as schools plan for the unknowns of the coming academic year.

What is clear with any of these models, though, is that support for teaching and learning, advising, student (not to mention faculty and staff) health and well-being, and coordination and logistics will need to be reinforced in all of these 15 scenarios. Adopting any (or any combination) of these scenarios for the fall will also require us to reimagine how we build a supportive learning community. None of this will be easy.

Over the next couple of weeks, we will be working to delve more deeply into as many of these scenarios as possible. Our goal is to synthesize these ideas and to make some recommendations in a concise digital-only book, tentatively titled *The Low-Density University*. We'd love to hear your feedback on scenarios we've missed or how your school is thinking about the scenarios above. ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/digital-learning/blogs/learning-innovation/15-fall-scenarios>

Laying Groundwork for Fall, With or Without a Pandemic

Everyone's asking what happens in the fall. Nothing is firm, but some colleges are telegraphing their intentions.

By **Lilah Burke** // April 24, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/PIXELCI

The talk around what college is going to look like in the fall is still, for now, just talk. The difficult calls have not been made, those hard-to-send emails have not been sent. The question of whether campuses will be closed to students is still in many ways an open one.

But every day the picture gets clearer. Some universities, if they have not made firm decisions, have indicated where they're leaning.

Two universities in the California State University system, San José State and Cal State Fullerton, have been open about considering and planning for a fall semester online. Though officials at those colleges have emphasized that nothing is set in stone, they are getting everything in order for a possible virtual semester.

The opposite is true at some oth-

er universities, which have said that they are preparing for a semester on campus. Purdue University president Mitch Daniels sent a letter to the university's constituents this week explaining that the administration is looking at separating people by age and vulnerability and limiting class sizes in the fall.

He did not mention the possibility of a fully online semester and said that the virus poses a near "zero lethal threat" to the under-35 age group, which makes up 80 percent of the total community.

William Jewell College in Missouri similarly announced that the administration is planning for an on-campus semester.

One reason for the differences in messaging might be location. Fullerton and San José are in some of the most populous metropolitan ar-

reas in the country. West Lafayette, Ind., and Liberty, Mo., are much less dense.

Chuck Staben, former president of the University of Idaho, said that institutions like Purdue and his own may be more likely to emphasize a face-to-face start.

"A residential campus like the University of Idaho that's in a fairly isolated location depends so much on really bringing students to that location," he said. "They're going to try very hard to have a face-to-face semester."

Staben noted that public and private colleges may also have different pressures.

"Private institutions, of course, aside from maybe the very top ones, are extremely tuition dependent. I think they will be under a lot of pressure to have face-to-face class-

es rather than online classes, because I think we're seeing student dissatisfaction with paying normal tuition for online classes," he said. "The higher the tuition, probably the greater that level of dissatisfaction."

Some in higher ed have suggested that there are many potential scenarios for the fall. Joshua Kim and Edward Maloney, teaching and learning specialists at Dartmouth College and Georgetown University, respectively, explored 15 of them in a blog post for *Inside Higher Ed* this week. Their list included a hybrid semester, a delayed start (like Macalester College has considered) or a block plan (which Beloit College and Centre College have already announced).

A survey from the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers suggested that 16 to 21 percent of institutions are considering a delayed start to the semester. Earlier this month, Georgetown told its continuing M.B.A. students that their semester would be pushed back two weeks, from Aug. 26 to Sept. 14.

Kim and Maloney noted that some universities may consider not holding the fall semester at all and reopening in 2021, as Stanford University has openly considered. At other universities, such as Cleveland State University, officials have said that is not on the table.

Staben said that a complete fall closure won't be possible for most universities with tenure-track faculty members who need to be paid.

"It's extremely difficult to even think about 15 different scenarios," he said. "My thinking as a former president would be you need to think of two or three scenarios that seem reasonably likely and perhaps try to plan for those."

Harvey Kesselman, president of Stockton University, in New Jersey,

“

Campuses
have to be ready to go
both ways.

”

echoed that thinking. He said the college is really only considering an online semester, a completely normal semester or an in-person semester with some adjustments.

Kesselman emphasized that there is only so much planning that can occur internally.

"If [the governor of New Jersey] were to say, 'No, we're going to continue students learning remotely,' it really wouldn't matter what we said."

The urban-rural division that Staben contemplated isn't the only one that could unfold. With governors sometimes taking radically different approaches to the virus response, it's possible that the politics of a state could affect its opening. Southern states with Republican governors, such as Georgia, have been pursuing aggressive reopening plans in the hopes of limiting economic damage.

Pressure to Make a Decision

While colleges still have four months until the traditional start to the semester, and most have indicated that they are comfortable waiting, there is some pressure from incoming and prospective students to make a firm decision soon.

Low yields and declining rates at which students are completing the

federal financial aid application indicate that many students may be rethinking their college decisions or sitting on the fence. Loss of income may mean a decreased ability to pay for college. For the more fortunate, the possibility of a virtual semester may mean not getting the college experience they envisioned.

Of course, all this could spell disaster for colleges, which have forecast catastrophic losses and responded with hiring freezes and pay cuts. The University of Arizona, which has said it is planning on a return to campus, said it's expecting to lose \$250 million from the pandemic.

Staben said the University of Idaho is similarly seeing a decline in admissions yield. Those institutions that are telegraphing a decision, he said, may be trying to lessen uncertainty for students so they'll commit.

Faculty needs may also play into when a decision is made. The more notice instructors have, the better they can prepare their classes to go virtual. Some faculty union contracts may have stipulations about summer work.

Gregory Chris Brown, president of the California Faculty Association union chapter at Fullerton, said the

Laying Groundwork for Fall, With or Without a Pandemic (cont.)

union would like to be part of the decision making for fall, but currently is not.

"CFA's position is [faculty] should be compensated for the extra work that they're taking on changing modalities," he said.

San José State has said it plans to use the summer to train up to 500 faculty in online and hybrid teaching.

A Normal Semester, With Some Adjustments

"There is absolutely no tabletop exercise that can prepare an institution for this," said Kesselman, the Stockton president.

With an unprecedented catastrophe, decision makers are looking at some unprecedented changes.

Kesselman said that Stockton, which normally has 3,500 students

living on campus, is making contingency plans in case the university is unable to house all of them due to social distancing. At the university's Atlantic City campus, that might include putting students up in empty casino or resort housing.

William Jewell College has said that all students will be able to receive a private residence upon request.

Other general possibilities include fall sports taking place without spectators or being canceled altogether.

Separating age groups or having the vulnerable work from home might involve classrooms full of students but with a lecturer teaching virtually.

Daniels at Purdue raised the possibility in his letter of testing stu-

dents before arrival for infections and antibodies.

Bryan Alexander, a senior researcher at Georgetown University, said one scenario might include a "toggle" semester, where leaders need to be prepared to switch from in-person to online quickly as virus cases ebb and flow.

"Then campuses have to be ready to go both ways," he said.

The semester ahead will no doubt be rocky. The only thing to do is plan, though whether those plans will look anything like reality remains to be seen.

"Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth," said Staben, referencing a famous Mike Tyson quote.

"We've been hit in the mouth." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/24/colleges-lay-groundwork-fall-or-without-pandemic>

What Do Fall Reopening Plans Mean Amid This Much Uncertainty?

Colleges have released a flurry of statements saying that they will reopen campuses in the fall. Will that plan bear out?

By **Lilah Burke** // April 30, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/SSHEPARD

In the last few days, a number of colleges have announced they will be reopening in the fall. Or, maybe, they "plan" to reopen. "Intend" to reopen.

The list now includes American University, Baylor University and Haverford College, as well as many others.

The numerous announcements have often included caveats, such as "if it is deemed safe" or "depending on guidance from state and federal authorities."

Some in higher ed have questioned the value of these statements (doesn't every institution "hope" to reopen in the fall?) as well as how closely a college's intentions will hew to reality.

Robert Kelchen, a professor of

higher education at Seton Hall University, called the statements "posturing." What a college announces today really has little relation to what its semester will look like in the fall, he said.

"I don't make much of anything out of these statements," Kelchen said. "The college presidents know it's not under their control."

College presidents said they've made careful decisions with the health of students, faculty and staff members as a top priority. They said they are well aware that a move by lawmakers or a new outbreak could scuttle their plans.

Dominique Baker, a professor of education policy at Southern Methodist University, emphasized the uncertainty of the situation. "The

reason that we see so many statements that say, 'This is what we plan but we are open to changing' is that so much of this is unknown," she said. "The only thing we know for sure is that there is uncertainty."

Why Announce?

With colleges predicting severe revenue losses from the fall semester, and current students threatening tuition strikes and lawsuits if their fees aren't discounted for online learning, the decision to announce a fall reopening may in some ways be a numbers game for colleges. Students have been more wary than usual about committing to a college, and over 400 institutions have pushed back their traditional deposit deadlines.

"If colleges appear hesitant about

What Do Fall Reopening Plans Mean Amid This Much Uncertainty? (cont.)

opening up in person, students may choose to attend another college, even when the statements have no relation to whether the college will actually open or not," Kelchen said. "[Tuition] is part of basically every college's decision."

A flurry of announcements has come out this week, just before May 1, which is traditionally the day by which students are asked to decide and deposit.

Erin Hennessy, vice president at TVP Communications, said that's no coincidence.

"Institutions are putting their credibility on the line with students and their families," she said, "and hoping that those students and families don't make other choices that will negatively impact institutional bottom lines."

Kelchen said the decision may also be an attempt, especially at public colleges, to please governors and lawmakers that have been pushing to open their economies as soon as possible.

But certainly some of the pressure to make an announcement of intention has come from students and families themselves.

"We know that there's a real hunger among our students and parents to just have an answer -- are you going to be open or not?" said Elizabeth MacLeod Walls, president of William Jewell College, which announced its intent to reopen last week.

The response from students and families to the college's announcement has been overwhelmingly positive, she said, which social media posts from students bear out.

What Does a Reopening Look Like?

MacLeod Walls said William Jewell is uniquely situated to be able to open in the fall.

The campus is located in Liberty,

Mo., which is much less dense than other parts of the country. Total enrollment is under 1,000 students, and the college has the inventory to give every student a single room. The administration has partnered with a bio-risk firm to assess the threat throughout the summer and the semester. And like other presidents, MacLeod Walls stressed that reopening in the fall is only an intention, not a guarantee. A serious outbreak or guidance from state and local public health officials would obviously change things, and the safety of students and staff is of utmost importance.

Radford University, with a western Virginia campus that enrolls roughly 9,000 students, similarly announced this week that it will be reopening in the fall, although with less wiggle room and fewer caveats than many other institutional announcements.

"The campus reopening will include full operations, such as on-campus housing and dining services, followed by face-to-face instruction beginning on Aug. 24," the university said on its website. "The reopening process will begin on Aug. 3."

But Brian Hemphill, president of Radford, said there is surely some uncertainty and that the college is planning for several different contingencies. Changes to operations, such as limiting class sizes or altering sports events, are most definitely on the table, he said.

Some of the concern about fall reopenings is focused on faculty and staff members, who are typically more likely than students to be of advanced age or to have underlying health conditions, both of which make a person more vulnerable to COVID-19.

While students can ostensibly choose not to attend college, or take a semester off, that calculus is

more difficult for those who depend on their institution for a paycheck.

At William Jewell, MacLeod Walls said no student or faculty member will be forced to come to campus. Faculty will still have the option to teach online if they want, and students will have the option to attend their classes online. The college already accommodates any student who cannot attend classes in person, she said.

"We will have to assess, I think, a little more deeply how many students are going to require that so that we can be ready for it," she said.

At Radford, the reopening plan calls for some staff to return to campus shortly after June 10, the date Virginia's stay-at-home order is set to be lifted.

Responding to a question about faculty or staff who may be feeling uncomfortable returning, Hemphill emphasized the role of social distancing and personal protective equipment.

"We're going to make sure that as we are moving forward and making decisions on the phased return of our staff and then our faculty, we're going to make sure that social distancing is very much a part of those conversations," he said. "We're going to make sure we're thinking about the importance of PPE and providing the appropriate safety measures to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our faculty and staff."

As for students, Hemphill said Radford would work with them on an individual basis.

Jim Keller, a higher education lawyer at the law firm Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr, said if colleges choose to reopen, they may see potential disability accommodations claims from staff or students with underlying conditions. Those claims would

What Do Fall Reopening Plans Mean Amid This Much Uncertainty? (cont.)

not be likely to succeed as long as colleges take reasonable effort to accommodate people, he said.

Colleges that reopen may also see tort claims from parents or students if they are exposed to COVID-19 on campus, Keller said, although those also would be unlikely to succeed.

Some institutions have been thinking about incorporating informed consent forms or liability waivers into their enrollment contracts, Keller said. But the optics of that decision, combined with the varying enforceability of waivers in different states, may make those forms less than ideal for colleges.

What If You're Wrong?

Hennessy, from TVP Communications, which is a higher education-focused firm, said colleges are rolling the dice with their decision making.

"Every institution is making a bet and hoping it's the right one, and we're not going to know if it's the right one for a while," she said. "The circumstances around the virus

have changed so rapidly that making a bold statement about your plan of action for August or September in late April almost guarantees that you're going to have to eat some number of your words when we get to the fall."

Having to go back on commitments might make some colleges look bad, she said. "How are those students and families going to feel if they put their trust in an institution that says, 'We intend to open face-to-face in the fall' and then they have to backtrack later this summer?"

Hennessy said it's hard to give advice to colleges at this stage, but she would emphasize communicating frequently and transparently to make sure that, even if people aren't happy with a decision, they know how an administration arrived at it.

"That's the way you maintain credibility as an institution," she said.

Some colleges, such as Cornell University, East Tennessee State University and Shenandoah University, have said they are unlikely

to make an announcement for a couple of weeks. Colleges such as San José State University and California State University at Fullerton have been more open than others about planning for an online semester, leading to some amount of groaning and concern from their students on social media.

But Kelchen says the California State University system is unique because its campuses have no trouble filling seats, and those institutions likely will not regret their decision.

"They're not really concerned about enrolling enough students. They have plenty of students they can choose from," he said. "If anything, saying that we're prepared to go online may reassure some students who are choosing colleges."

Kelchen said that as far as firm commitments, the rubber won't meet the road until late June or early July.

"Don't pay attention to what colleges are saying now," he said. "Wait to see what they're saying two months from now." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/30/what-does-intent-reopen-mean>

Decision Points Loom for College Leaders

Scenario planning is getting attention as a tool for navigating an uncertain time. But when will leaders need to make big decisions?

By **Rick Seltzer** // April 30, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MANANYA KAEWTHAWEE

The novel coronavirus pandemic converted many college and university leaders into fans of scenario planning.

It's easy to see why. The fast-shifting landscape and massive changes to core campus operations beg for a mechanism that allows board members, presidents, top administrators and deans to prepare for vastly different futures. Many have attested to scenario planning's usefulness, whether they outline three or 15 different scenarios for the future.

But at some point, leaders need to switch from planning to making decisions about which scenarios to follow.

Making choices tied to one decision point doesn't preclude future

choices changing as more information comes available. In such an unsettled time, the scenarios are always changing, experts stressed. The decision points are, too.

"Our scenarios must be robust, must be clear as daylight, and we must be willing to make adjustments to decisions that we make in real time," said Benjamin Ola Akande, assistant vice chancellor for international affairs, Africa, and associate director of the Global Health Center at Washington University in St. Louis, who this month was named president of Champlain College in Vermont.

In conversations over the last week, leaders and the consultants they work with outlined some of the most important decision points

they're watching. Those points are explained below, grouped loosely by whether they're tied to a specific date on the calendar or other condition. Many lend themselves to decisions about whether to reopen for the fall or not. But they may still be pertinent even for colleges that have made that decision and must still plot other scenarios, such as whether to shuffle the academic calendar or make major operational restructuring decisions.

Points in Time

Pre-May 1 Admissions Milestones: Early indicators showed the COVID-19 pandemic generating cause for concern as competitive colleges built their classes for next year.

Recent private polling indicat-

Decision Points Loom for College Leaders (cont.)

ed that one in six students who'd planned to attend four-year colleges no longer plan to do so. Other surveys led a firm to conclude that four-year colleges may lose as many as a fifth of students. Many families reported losing income amid the coronavirus, and existing college students pushed back on the idea of paying full price to traditional in-person colleges for remote instruction should campuses be unable to reopen in the fall.

So it's no surprise that college leaders report making various decisions based on how their spring admissions seasons were taking shape. Those decisions include pricing actions like freezes or even cuts to tuition. Some changed the way they communicate with prospective students, emphasizing how colleges have supported students who were being sent home for the spring semester or accommodated students with flexible grading policies.

Some may find it too cynical to suggest admissions considerations factored into colleges beginning to announce plans to reopen for the fall semester this week, during the run-up to deposit day on May 1. But in the last week or so, some colleges have grown much more aggressive about communicating their intention to reopen, and leaders made clear that many campuses need to reopen in the fall to secure their own futures.

"The basic business model for most colleges and universities is simple -- tuition comes due twice a year at the beginning of each semester," wrote Brown University's president, Christina Paxson, in a Sunday opinion piece for *The New York Times*. "Most colleges and universities are tuition dependent. Remaining closed in the fall means losing as much as half of our revenue."

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Decision points are very much on everyone's mind.

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And at least one community college in Northern California connected student decisions to an announcement that it will stick with distance learning in the fall.

"We want students to know what they're signing up for," Sierra College spokesperson Josh Morgan said, according to CBS Sacramento.

May 1 and June 1 Decision Days: Many colleges pushed their decision days -- the dates by which high school seniors committing to attend must submit deposits -- back from the traditional May 1 to June 1. Experts anticipate both dates will be important for colleges and universities that need to count their freshman classes and decide on next steps.

"If we wanted to timeline it, I do think May 1 is still going to be an important milestone," said Peter Stokes, managing director at the consulting firm Huron's education strategy and operations group. "The information we get there will be very telling."

Mid-June: Once the new, later June 1 decision day has passed, some admissions experts suggested colleges and universities will turn their full attention to retaining rising sophomores, juniors and seniors,

as well as avoiding summer melt among incoming freshmen. Feedback they receive could filter into decisions about additional retention actions or even cost-cutting.

Annual board meetings: Most colleges and universities close their fiscal years at the end of June. It would seem to be a natural time for major decisions to be made as boards hold regular meetings at the end of the year.

That may happen in some cases. But in the current crisis, engaged boards aren't always waiting for end-of-the-year meetings to make decisions that are critical.

"Boards are meeting more frequently in order to consider information," said Merrill Schwartz, senior vice president for content strategy and development at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. "Decision points are very much on everyone's mind."

Cutoff dates: Major undertakings like reopening campuses for all students come with deadlines driven by logistics. It simply takes time to bring back staff members and prepare campuses for a fall of in-person instruction. For example, Radford University in Virginia

Decision Points Loom for College Leaders (cont.)

said plans to reopen in the fall will require select employees to return before the state is scheduled to lift a shelter-in-place order June 10.

How much time varies from campus to campus. But leaders have likely reverse-engineered a cutoff date by which they'll have to make certain major decisions.

"There's going to come a point where we're going to have to make a decision about when we are going to physically be on campus, because we have to gear up," said Thomas Galligan, interim president at Louisiana State University. "But other than that, our decision points are substantive, and safety is our guidepost."

This type of deadline is more about closing off scenarios. Leaders could move to keep open their options long before it's clear whether in-person classes can actually resume.

"The question becomes, 'What do you think is likely to happen, and given what you think is likely to happen, how achievable is it in the space of May, June, July, August, to be ready?'" Stokes said. "If you want to be there by fall, you've got to be running right now. That's not something you can put off for a couple of weeks."

Government and Regulatory Decisions

Elected officials: One of the biggest decision points comes when elected officials make their own decisions. But the landscape here is highly complex.

When do governors lift stay-at-home orders? Do mayors or local officials ban large gatherings, preventing large lecture classes in the process? Do any health officials place restrictions on dormitory living? What about travel restrictions?

"Think about if you do have residential students," said Nicholas

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The question becomes,
'What do you think is likely to happen,
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Santilli, senior director for learning strategy at the Society for College and University Planning, who has been developing a scenario planning guide intended to help colleges recover after the pandemic. "You decide to open up on a particular date. But what happens if there is still a quarantine order in place for individuals traveling across state lines?"

Most college leaders appear to be focused more on conditions than dates, Santilli said.

Health-care officials: Guidance from health-care officials and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will play a big part in helping colleges decide whether they can reopen for in-person instruction at any point and how to do so.

Any information about how facilities need to be cleaned will be taken into account. So too will guidelines for distancing and detailed plans for phased reopening within states.

"We're still on a stay-at-home order," said Galligan, of LSU. "Once our governor lifts that stay-at-home order, in part we'll be coming back in phases, and getting to the next phase is going to depend in part on not only what the governor does

and CDC recommends, but on staying safe for two weeks under the previous phase."

Changing Data and Conditions

Watching states open for business: Experts suggested colleges and universities will closely watch the experiences of states that are slowly reopening their economies, like Georgia, Florida and Texas.

Spiking infection rates, or consumers who refuse to go out, would suggest very different courses of action for higher education than would an orderly return to business as usual.

Texas governor Greg Abbott has detailed plans to reopen restaurants and other businesses starting May 1. The state's higher ed leaders will be watching -- likely along with leaders in other states.

"In the timeline that Governor Abbott laid out, we're all going to be monitoring the next couple of weeks very closely as they start to open up certain kinds of businesses," said Harrison Keller, commissioner of higher education for Texas. "There is going to be a lot of attention around May 18 for updated guidance coming out. It could come out sooner if it's necessary and appropriate. But that will be an

Decision Points Loom for College Leaders (cont.)

important date for us in Texas as we see what happens over the next couple of weeks.”

Some higher ed leaders may balk at the idea that decisions about students should be informed in any way by the experiences of, say, reopening restaurants. But economists see some parallels. Some predict more long-term pain if restaurants or colleges reopen too soon, only to have infection rates spike and consumer confidence plunge further.

“Think about it from the standpoint of the student or prospective student,” said Roland Rust, a professor at the University of Maryland’s school of business, during a Thursday conference call. “Economic problems combined with behavioral problems of students not wanting to be here, those combine to be a very tough problem to solve.”

While the experience of one state or region may inform decisions in others, experts caution that wise courses of action will still vary between different areas.

Health care and medical factors: How widespread does testing become? What’s the likelihood that a vaccine is developed in a year? What is happening to infection and death rates nationwide? What is happening to infection and death rates within a certain region?

Changing answers to all those questions will trigger different decisions.

“We’ll know a lot more in 30 days,” said Galligan, of LSU. “We’re just going to try and keep up with the knowledge and public health data.”

State finances: The state funding picture will be critical to public institutions and many private institutions across the country.

It’s no secret that the economic collapse prompted by the pandem-

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Economic problems combined with behavioral problems of students not wanting to be here, those combine to be a very tough problem to solve.

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ic has slashed state tax revenue while ramping up costs such as unemployment insurance. And as experts at the State Higher Education Executive Officers association have taken to saying, higher education tends to be the wheel upon which state budgets are balanced.

How and when states change their spending plans could have ramifications for the types of spending and tuition decisions public colleges and universities need to make. It will also affect many private institutions in states with financial aid programs for students. Think of private colleges and universities in Illinois, which suffered several years ago when a state budget impasse prevented regular disbursement of grants under the state’s Monetary Award Program.

Institutional factors: Scenarios available to colleges will change as various institutional factors and capacities evolve. Such factors include the capacity to quarantine students on campus should an outbreak occur, institutions’ ability to maintain a strong online or remote education over time, labor levels and how much of a financial cushion exists, experts said.

For example, if a large number of

faculty members who have health concerns balk at the idea of teaching in person in the fall, it becomes much harder to bring students back to campus without making major changes. But if faculty members take the lead in developing strong online or remote options, an institution’s decision making may become easier.

When others act: Generally speaking, higher education leaders like to know what everyone else is doing before they make a decision themselves.

“One of the things our members have been asking us for information about is how other institutions are handling the situation,” said Schwartz, of AGB. “It isn’t the same for a big public university system as it is for a small college in a rural area. They want to know how other institutions ‘like us’ are handling a situation. When are they making the decision? What are they doing about tuition? What are their expectations about fall enrollment? How are they handling clinical courses of study?”

Institutions generally follow peers or more prestigious institutions, experts said. They don’t usually follow the lead of an institution

Decision Points Loom for College Leaders (cont.)

considered to be less prestigious.

One new working paper looks at about 1,400 colleges and universities that decided to transition to online instruction between early March and early April. Six in 10 colleges in the data set closed between March 10 and 13, said one of its authors, Christopher R. Marsicano, a visiting assistant professor in the department of educational studies at Davidson College.

“That doesn’t just happen,” he said in email. “Either there was some serious coordination, or they are all looking to each other for guidance.”

One decision point is always “when others act,” said Marsicano, who stressed that the paper’s findings are preliminary.

Order of Importance

The above list isn’t meant to be

comprehensive.

It doesn’t take into account many factors colleges and universities are weighing, nor does it touch on the wide range of scenarios different types of institution will be planning. State and local funding levels may be more important for community colleges than for elite research institutions, for instance.

The same developments might stress institutions in different ways, as well. It’s possible students will see uncertainty and eschew high-priced private colleges in lieu of a year of taking general education requirements at community colleges. And only some community colleges in well-populated or wealthy areas may see a surge in student interest. Others in hard-hit parts of the country may see declines in interest.

Still, experts suggest many insti-

tutions follow a rough framework as they move from scenario planning to decision point. First, ask what to do in each scenario. Then ask about cutoff dates for making operational decisions. Finally, ask when the market needs to know about a decision, said David Strauss, a principal at Art & Science Group, a Baltimore-based consulting firm.

When thinking about decision points, many experts observed that leaders sometimes fall into wishful thinking. Only time will tell whether they break that pattern during this crisis.

“The knee-jerk or hopeful planning versus the empirically based planning is fascinating,” Strauss said. “And it mirrors what institutions do on the larger strategic questions when we’re not in the midst of COVID-19.” ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/30/what-are-some-key-decision-points-colleges-face>

Rethinking the Academic Calendar

Beloit College moves from traditional semesters to two-course modules to allow for flexibility next fall in case of continued closures.

By **Elizabeth Redden** // April 20, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/WILDPixel

Leaders of Beloit College, a private liberal arts college in Wisconsin, obviously are not alone in trying to plan for the upcoming academic year in a period of great uncertainty. As at almost every other college and university across the country, administrators are having to prepare for various scenarios. Can in-person learning resume in time for the fall, or will students need to start their fall coursework online? If in-person learning does resume, will it need to be suspended again if COVID-19 cases begin to increase?

"We're making all these weighty decisions about the future and what to do with refunds for room and board, and at the height of all that decision making, it felt a lot like triage, a lot like a defensive posture,"

said Eric Boynton, Beloit's provost. He asked himself, "What is the decisive step that we can take at this moment" to inspire confidence and hope in what the fall will look like?

To that end, Beloit has announced that it is breaking the semester into two modules in which students take two courses each.

"The aspiration is to have a residential learning experience next year, but if COVID rages, this flexibility allows us to have it only affect half a semester, possibly," Boynton said. "Let's say it creeps into September, then that first module is online, but if continues to dissipate, then we're able to bring students at this hinge point. It's a break in the semester; it's an obvious time to bring students into residence."

"It also lessens the disruption in the sense of conducting four online courses at one time is a lot of pressure for faculty, and what we're finding -- and I think this is not just at Beloit but across the nation -- is that juggling four online courses is a lot for students," he said. "Limiting the online experience to two courses at a time is better for faculty and staff and student learning."

Beloit moved quickly in rolling out a module model. Boynton said he had a conversation about the idea with Beloit's president, Scott Bierman, on March 21. On March 23, the Academic Strategic Planning Committee, which is made up of faculty members, voted to recommend moving forward with the proposal. And by March 25,

Rethinking the Academic Calendar (cont.)

the modules were approved by the Emergency Academic Authority, a group of faculty members and administrators charged with approving changes to academic programs when “operations of the College and the ability of the Academic Senate to gather are disrupted significantly due to local, regional, or national events, such as but not limited to a catastrophic weather event or a pandemic.”

Matt Tedesco, a professor of philosophy and the chair of the Academic Strategic Planning Committee, said faculty understand the rationale for the change and support it.

“We’ve tried to reach out to faculty pretty thoroughly; we’ve had two separate faculty meetings on Zoom,” he said. “We all recognize this is not a small ask. This does involve significant work over the summer to rethink our courses for the year.”

Tedesco said the idea of moving to modules was discussed as part of an institutional planning process during the 2014-15 academic year, but it never got past the exploratory stage. The public health

crisis caused by the coronavirus presented an urgent opportunity to put the idea into action.

“We believe it offers us the best chance to be proactive in a situation where we control so little,” Tedesco said.

Lucie Lapovksy, a consultant and former president of Mercy College in New York, said she was impressed when she read about Beloit’s rethinking of the academic calendar. (She said Beloit is not a client.)

“I thought they were thinking outside the box in a creative way for an unusual situation that may in the long run turn out to serve them really well,” she said. “One of the questions everyone is asking is what are the innovations and the changes brought on by how you’re operating during the virus that you’re going to decide are going to stick?”

Beloit has struggled with enrollment fluctuations in recent years: after enrolling entering classes of 299 students each in 2013 and 2014, it enrolled exceptionally large classes of 392 in fall 2015 and 382 in 2016. Then first-year enrollment

fell to 323 students in 2017, to 266 in 2018 and 259 last fall.

Boynton, the provost, said the original target was to enroll 250 to 260 new students this fall.

“We had targets, and now the world is upside down,” he said. “We know -- and Beloit is not the only institution in this situation -- that it’s hard to predict what the incoming class will look like. There are so many variables.”

In addition to rolling out the shift to modules, Beloit has also announced several other changes in response to COVID-19, including freezing tuition costs and matching in-state tuition rates at public flagship universities in the region.

“The Midwest Flagship Match means that for prospective students who are residents of six Midwestern states -- Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin -- we’ll make sure that your cost to attend Beloit will match or beat the tuition at your state’s flagship campus,” Beloit promises on its website.

“We’re demonstrating that Beloit is an institution that tackles these problems,” Boynton said. ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/20/beloit-redesigns-its-academic-calendar-give-itself-more-flexibility-if-covid-19>

IMPORTANT DATA

Key Takeaways:

- The pandemic's economic impacts are massive. Six in 10 Americans reported losing jobs, hours or income from the coronavirus pandemic as of early April, and early data suggested degrees weren't protecting workers as they have in the past.
- Workers show high interest in online education.
- Social distancing on campus may be difficult. The average student at one large university shares classes with more than 500 different students in the average week, research suggests.
- Hybrid educational models may not cause a large reduction in student contacts on campus, although this finding may or may not hold everywhere because of differences in the ways institutions are structured.
- College presidents are highly concerned about low-income and underrepresented students who are most vulnerable to having their educations derailed, survey data show.
- As of mid-April, more presidents planned to return most courses to in-person formats by fall than had an uncertain reopening timeline, 47 percent versus 34 percent.
- More cost-cutting is coming at many institutions, according to survey data.
- Presidents have been growing more concerned about students' mental health over time.

Out of Work, Uncertain About the Future

A new survey suggests more than 60 percent of Americans have lost income amid the pandemic and recession. Those seeking more education are looking online.

By Lilah Burke // April 9, 2020



Six in 10 Americans have lost jobs, hours or income from the coronavirus pandemic, according to results of a new survey from Strada Education Network, a nonprofit that researches and funds education and employment pathways. These results are the second weekly batch in a multiweek longitudinal study. The share of respondents who have lost income is up 15 percentage points from the previous week's results.

Strada's data suggest that degrees and credentials are not insulating Americans from the economic effects of the pandemic. Two-thirds of associate or vocational degree holders and 63 percent of bachelor's degree holders reported lost income, compared to only 54 percent of participants with some college

experience but no degree.

"Although this is hitting everyone really hard, in some ways that population was a little bit less impacted by losing jobs or income," Nichole Torpey-Saboe, Strada's director of research, said in reference to the participants with some college credit but no degree, noting that in the future the organization may want to look at the industries where those respondents are employed.

About a third of respondents said that if they were to lose their job, they believe they would need additional education or training to maintain their same income, consistent with the previous week's results. Of those, 64 percent said they would look for a job in a different field.

The Strada respondents also demonstrated a large preference for online instruction. Over half said that if they were given \$5,000 to invest in their education, they would spend it on online education, as opposed to in-person education or employer-provided training.

Torpey-Saboe said that while a person's level of education affected what degree level they would choose to pursue in that situation (bachelor's degree holders aren't looking at community colleges, for example), the preference for online was felt at all education levels.

"We haven't seen any sort of pattern that stands out for level of education," she said.

The survey did not address how consumers believe they will pay

Out of Work, Uncertain About the Future (cont.)

or would like to pay for any future education. Dave Clayton, Strada's senior vice president for consumer insights, said that when the dust settles and government stimulus bills have been completed, that may be a better time to ask the question.

Andrew Hanson, director of research at Strada, said that while the survey did not look at exactly how this downturn is affecting employment pathways, there is definite concern in that area.

"Access to things like internships and other options that employers provide are of concern I would think going forward, but it's probably too early to tell," he said.

In the 2008 recession, he noted, more recent employees were usu-

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Access to things like internships and other options that employers provide are of concern.

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ally the first to be let go.

"No reason to anticipate that will be different this time," he said.

The latest survey was conducted

with 1,000 respondents over the age of 18 and was representative of the general population in terms of age, gender, region and race. ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/09/americans-are-losing-income-and-preferring-online-education>

Degrees of Separation

Students' course enrollments mean high levels of interconnectedness and suggest caution when it comes to resuming in-person instruction, researchers say.

By **Elizabeth Redden** // April 14, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/RECEP-BG

As colleges grapple with the question of whether and when it will be safe to resume in-person instruction, a newly published working paper analyzing course enrollment patterns at Cornell University found that nearly all students are connected via a shared classmate.

"Over a typical week, the average student will share classes with more than 500 different students," one of the paper's authors, Kim Weeden, said in a summary of the results on Twitter. "This number is higher for lower-division students, because they tend to take more large introductory courses. The average student can 'reach' only about 4 percent of other students by virtue of sharing a course together, but 87 percent of students can reach each other in two steps, via a shared classmate. By three

steps, it's 98 percent."

Weeden and Benjamin Cornwell, both sociology professors at Cornell University, also found that a hybrid model in which large courses would be taught online and smaller ones would be taught via face-to-face instruction "would not appreciably reduce the interconnectedness of students in the full course enrollment network." They found that even after eliminating the 126 classes that had 100 or more students from the analysis, "the campus-wide network remains highly connected."

"These results suggest caution in reopening colleges and universities for face-to-face instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic," Weeden and Cornwell wrote in their working paper.

"We were sort of hoping that

once you eliminated the 100 biggest courses on campus you might be able to disconnect this network: it didn't work out that way," Weeden, the Jan Rock Zubrow '77 Professor of the Social Sciences at Cornell, said in an interview.

"I think we were a little bit surprised about how tight the connections really are, what a small world it really is, and in particular that there are so many different paths between any two students. It's not just one student who is connecting any given pair of students. It's multiple ways that you can get to student A or student B. Even if they're not taking a class together, they're likely taking it with a third person that they share in common. One of the lessons is that university administrators may need to think creatively about what's going on in

Degrees of Separation (cont.)

their local context. Our study was just Cornell, and all universities, even those of fairly similar size, are structured a little bit differently."

"How do we minimize the risk, recognizing first of all that courses are just one way that college students come in contact with each other, particularly on a residential campus?" Weeden said of questions faced by college administrators. "Are there alternative ways we can deliver high-quality content that isn't the standard face-to-face model but isn't moving everything online, either? Could we put some classes online? Could we think about a block schedule where students take one course for three weeks at a time with the same students and move to another class after that? Are there ways that we can think about structuring some

of our classes and still get some of the benefits of face-to-face instruction?"

The working paper, which is based on an analysis of spring 2015 undergraduate course enrollments at Cornell, has not yet been peer reviewed, though Weeden said she and Cornwell feel confident enough in the data and findings to post the paper on an open-science platform. She said as well that the network analysis methodology used in the study is fairly straightforward.

In their working paper, Weeden and Cornwell note limitations of the study, including the fact that the data are reflective of just one university and that "course enrollment networks do not capture the many ways that students are connected outside of the classroom through advisors, friends, parties, athletics

and other extra-curricular activities, or living situations."

"At the same time, course enrollment networks may overstate the density of the networks through which a virus is likely to be transmitted," Weeden and Cornwell wrote. "Most obviously, two students who are co-enrolled in a large lecture course may never come in close physical proximity to each other. Similarly, classes, particularly large ones, rarely achieve full attendance. Future work should consider factors such as physical space within a classroom or attendance rates to fine-tune estimates of how course enrollment networks may pattern the diffusion of a virus, a rumor, an idea, or anything else that can be transmitted through direct or indirect social contact on a college campus." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/14/sociologists-say-their-findings-student-interconnectedness-suggest-caution-needed>

Low-Income Students Top Presidents' COVID-19 Worry List

In mid-April, nearly half of college presidents said they expected to return the majority of courses to an in-person format by the start of the fall semester. But a third had an uncertain timeline for reopening.

By **Doug Lederman** // April 27, 2020



In mid-March, as the novel coronavirus was taking hold on many campuses, *Inside Higher Ed* surveyed college presidents and found them to be focused on the job at hand: ensuring the physical and psychological safety of students and employees and enabling the smoothest possible transition to remote learning, for faculty members and students alike.

Yes, they acknowledged the threat of major financial and enrollment damage to their institutions and were beginning to think about how their institutions might adapt to a landscape that could be permanently altered by a crisis that some say may be the biggest since World War II. But the focus was on emergency response, on the "now."

Exactly a month later, in mid-April, *Inside Higher Ed* went back to them

again with a similar but slightly expanded set of questions. The new survey of 187 two- and four-year college presidents, published today and available for free download, offers a look at how campus leaders' views and actions are evolving as the COVID-19 pandemic and the recession it has spurred become the new status quo. The presidents, like all of us, continue to be bedeviled by a dearth of clear information about the arc of the health crisis and how and when some semblance of normalcy will return.

Among the findings:

- **Focus on the most vulnerable students.** Student and employee mental health, student attrition and unbudgeted financial costs remain near the top of presidents' list of short-term concerns, and potential enroll-

ment declines and threats to financial stability trouble them for the long term. But they say their primary concerns in the immediate and long term are about the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on low-income and underrepresented students, a recognition that even in the best of times those students are most vulnerable to seeing their educations derailed and their personal well-being threatened.

- **New investments.** Many more presidents in April than in March said their institutions had invested in key services for students and employees: new online learning resources (69 percent in April, compared to 43 percent in March), emergency response resources (52 percent versus 44 percent in March), and addi-

Low-Income Students Top Presidents' COVID-19 Worry List (cont.)

tional physical and mental health resources (36 percent versus 18 percent).

- **Uncertain timeline for fall.** Presidents remain unsure about when students might return to their campuses. Nearly half, 47 percent, said they expected to return the majority of courses to an in-person format by the start of the fall semester. But a full third, 34 percent, said they had an uncertain timeline for reopening.
- **Permanent changes?** Some of the decisions presidents have made in the last month may end up being permanent. When asked when they might reverse actions they had taken in response to COVID-19, half said they would never undo the investments they'd made in new online learning resources, and between a quarter and a half said the same about investments in physical or mental health resources (40 percent) and emergency response resources (28 percent). But some campus leaders said they expected to make permanent the shift of admissions to an online format (12 percent), the freezing or reduction of benefits (12 percent), and the embrace of remote-work policies for employees (10 percent), among other actions.
- **Employee cuts ahead.** More pain for employees is almost certainly ahead. While fewer than two in 10 presidents said they had thus far reduced their workforces (19 percent), furloughed employees (10 percent), frozen or reduced benefits (9 percent), or cut salaries (5 percent), between a third and two-thirds said they were very or somewhat likely to take those actions in the future.
- **Hopes for more revenue.** Asked how they would address poten-

tial budgetary problems, presidents focused overwhelmingly on actions to increase revenue, with 80 percent or more saying they would cultivate new donors, seek additional state support or try to procure more grants. A third or fewer said they would reduce extracurricular offerings or change their tuition prices.

Changes in Short-Term Priorities

The survey is roughly divided into sections on the short term and the longer term, with questions about presidents' concerns and actions on both horizons. The differences between the two administrations of the survey, in March and April, offers insight into how presidents' priorities have changed as the situation has evolved.

The mental health of students remains presidents' very top concern in the near term. The proportion of college leaders saying they are "very concerned" about student mental health grew to 47 percent in April from 37 percent in March. In most other areas posed to presidents in March and April alike, campus leaders expressed modestly less concern as time went on, including about students' physical health and faculty readiness to conduct digital learning.

But *Inside Higher Ed* asked presidents to respond to one additional area of possible concern in March: disproportionate impact of the coronavirus epidemic on students from low-income backgrounds.

More than two-thirds of presidents, 68 percent, said they were very concerned that needy students would be disproportionately hurt as campuses responded to COVID-19, more than for any other issue. Seventy-five percent of presidents of four-year public universities and 73 percent of community college

About the Survey

"Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis, Part II: A Survey of College and University Presidents" is available, free, for download [here](#).

The survey of 187 college leaders was conducted by Hanover Research on behalf of *Inside Higher Ed*.

The survey was made possible by advertising support from Accenture, Campus Management, ECMC Foundation, Ellucian and Pearson.

presidents responded that way, as did 59 percent of chief executives of four-year private colleges.

Advocates for low-income students were gratified by the presidents' priorities. "I'm surprised and pleased, actually," said Dale Whitaker, former president and provost at the University of Central Florida, where nearly four in 10 students are eligible for Pell Grants for needy students. "I thought financial stability would be first, enrollment second and equity third, maybe by a good distance. This shows people are really concerned, that they really care."

The other question about the immediate term related to which actions presidents have already taken on their campuses in response to COVID-19. The most-taken actions included steps most colleges took immediately (moved to remote instruction for students and remote work for employees, closed administrative offices) and those done as they began shifting their focus to next fall, such as moving their admissions processes and campus tours online.

Fewer than one in five presi-

Low-Income Students Top Presidents' COVID-19 Worry List (cont.)

dents said their institutions had by mid-April taken actions that affected employees' jobs or pay, with 19 percent having reduced their workforces and 10 percent or fewer furloughing employees, freezing or reducing benefits, or cutting pay.

Community colleges were more likely to have reduced their workforces (25 percent versus 16 percent at private nonprofit colleges and 14 percent at four-year publics) and to have furloughed employees (14 percent versus 11 percent at four-year privates and 5 percent of four-year publics), while private institutions were modestly more likely to have frozen or reduced benefits (14 percent) or cut pay (8 percent).

Some of the actions in the above list were added to the survey in April and weren't asked of presidents in March. Comparing the differences in the actions that institutions had taken by mid-March with those they had taken by mid-April suggests that more college and university leaders had invested in key areas needed to keep their institutions operating effectively now and in the coming months. In March, 43 percent of presidents said they had invested in new online learning resources; by April, that had climbed to 69 percent. Similar increases occurred for emergency response resources (52 percent versus 44 percent in March) and additional physical and mental health resources (a doubling, to 36 percent from 18 percent).

Those data suggest that campus leaders increasingly recognized that they needed to prepare their institutions, now and in the future, to ensure high-quality digital instruction and help their students and to protect students' and employees' physical and mental health. Community college leaders were sig-

nificantly likelier than their peers to have increased their spending in these areas: the proportion of two-year-college presidents who said their institution had invested in new online learning resources rose to 84 percent from 48 percent from March to April, for example.

When Will Colleges Undo Those Actions?

The March survey asked presidents when they expected to return to in-person instruction, and about a third (31 percent) predicted by fall, but more (41 percent) had an "uncertain timeline."

The April survey asked presidents that question in a slightly different way, by asking when they expected to reverse the entire set of actions they said their institution had already taken.

On the return to in-person instruction, presidents were more optimistic in mid-April than they were in mid-March that students would be back in classrooms by the fall, with nearly half of them saying so. Eight percent expected to return to in-person classes by next January, and about a third said they weren't sure.

When asked when they expected to reverse the broader set of actions their institutions had taken, several patterns emerge.

It's clear presidents have little line of sight about the course of the coronavirus and its potential impact on their campuses, with pluralities selecting the "uncertain timeline" option for many of the key questions facing their colleges, such as when students and employees may once again be able to travel internationally and when employees will return to work.

Another set of answers suggests presidents are counting on having their campuses reopen by the fall term -- perhaps too hopefully. A full

half of campus leaders said they planned to undo the suspension of athletics programs by the start of the fall semester, and nearly half say the same about opening dining halls (48 percent) and residence halls (46 percent).

Presidents of four-year private colleges are by far the most optimistic -- perhaps because they collectively may be most in danger if a fall reopening of campuses is not possible. Fifty-four percent of leaders of private institutions said they expect to return to in-person classes by fall, and nearly two-thirds (65 percent) said sports programs would be in place by fall.

Looking Ahead

Most presidents are still up to their necks in responding to the current moment, so asking them to gaze too far into the future and think beyond the tactical may be too much. "I do think that right now they're so engrossed in the tactics of what they see as survival," said Timothy Tracy, former provost at the University of Kentucky and now a consultant.

Asked to rate their long-term concerns, presidents again put concerns about equity for certain students at the top of their list. Comparing their answers in April to those in March, more leaders say they are very or somewhat concerned about a decline in charitable giving rates (64 percent versus 56 percent in March) and a perceived decrease in the value of higher education (60 percent versus 48 percent).

Fewer, however, say they're worried about demands for room and board reimbursement (42 percent versus 55 percent in March) and especially demands for tuition reimbursement (35 percent versus 62 percent). That's despite numerous reports in *Inside Higher Ed*

Low-Income Students Top Presidents' COVID-19 Worry List (cont.)

about class action lawsuits from students seeking such reimbursement -- and regular news releases *Inside Higher Ed* has received from lawyers discussing their plans to file such claims.

The declining concern about tuition reimbursement was driven mostly by a change in the view of four-year public college leaders. Only 28 percent of them reported being somewhat or very concerned about that possibility in April, down from 64 percent in March.

Again, analysts applauded the presidents' focus on vulnerable students. "The presidents' concerns long term about the impact on underrepresented students and individuals from low-income backgrounds are well founded," said Tracy, the former Kentucky provost, via email. "It will be critical for institutions to proactively reach out to these individuals and provide them with support services (financial counseling, academic counseling, emotional counseling, etc.) to help them navigate their options to enroll or to remain enrolled."

College leaders' concerns about their long-term financial stability and potential enrollment declines remain significant -- and the survey sought to gauge how likely they are to take certain actions to respond to those concerns.

First, presidents who had not yet taken the institutional actions described above were asked how likely they were to do so going forward. These answers are likely to trouble campus employees: nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of campus leaders who said they had not already reduced their workforce by mid-April said they would in the future, about half said they would furlough employees (49 percent) and more than a third said they would institute salary reductions (38 percent) or re-

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That's more than a haircut -- that's the kind of hit that may require organizational change.

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duce benefits (36 percent).

The survey also asked presidents how likely their institutions would be to take a series of actions in response to potential revenue shortfalls or cost overruns. As is often the case in *Inside Higher Ed's* other surveys of presidents, they tended to favor the less controversial approaches that could increase revenue (cultivating new donor bases, seeking more state support) rather than attempts to control or lower their costs. Whittaker, formerly of Central Florida, said he was troubled that presidents seemed to focus their attention on "pies that are shrinking" or likely to shrink during a deep recession, such as state funds or fundraising pools.

Presented with a list of possible approaches to avoid or address potential enrollment challenges, presidents overwhelmingly said they were likely to optimize the academic programs they offer and increase financial aid. Slightly more than half (56 percent) said they would allow students to defer tuition, as some institutions have done, but fewer than one in 10 said they would lower tuition or adopt a sliding tuition scale based on student income.

Comparing the list of what pres-

idents say are their top concerns with their preferred strategies for addressing them left Whittaker, the former Central Florida president and provost, questioning how well they were aligned.

Many institutions, he said, are facing budget reductions ranging from tens of millions to hundreds of millions of dollars, he said, depending on how long campuses are closed and how deep the recession is.

"That's more than a haircut -- that's the kind of hit that may require organizational change," Whittaker said. Most colleges and universities are in "triage mode right now," focused on "saving the patient," and they're figuring out "where the patient hurts" and "trying not to cut off the leg if they don't have to." In many cases they're making those decisions "without the information you'd ideally have to make decisions."

The fact that leaders say they are prioritizing equity for low-income or underrepresented students is commendable, in Whittaker's view, but it may force difficult decisions, he said, such as "how to use \$25 million in institutional financial aid ... How much do we use to buy full-paying students from out of state versus using the money to help retain or

Low-Income Students Top Presidents' COVID-19 Worry List (cont.)

recruit our neediest students."

As presidents and governing boards move out of triage mode, where they're focused on survival, they'll soon need to switch to the second and third phases, which involve resource reallocation and prioritization (if significant cuts are needed, as is likely for many colleges) and then transformation, or "fundamental reorganization or redesign."

In all three phases, he said, colleges and universities "need to be as true as possible to the institutional core mission -- who are we? Are we about reputation and excellence, such that we'd prioritize the student/faculty ratio and the personal residential experience? Or are we about equity of access and success?"

"Those values should be laid up against every decision and in a transparent way."

Other Findings

The survey addressed a handful of other topics.

■ **The shift to remote instruction.**

In general, presidents seem to have been heartened by how their colleges managed the emergency transition away from in-person learning. Fewer of them in April than in March rated the shift as very or somewhat challenging in terms of training faculty members less familiar with digital delivery (68 percent in April versus 75 percent in March), ensuring that academic standards remained high (47 percent versus 59 percent), and having technology support available (36 percent versus 50 percent). The survey did not ask them to rate the challenge of providing high-quality digital instruction in the fall, when faculty and student expectations are likely to be significantly higher.

■ **Help from the government.** Presidents overwhelmingly rate stimulus funds to compensate their institutions for financial losses

(93 percent) as their greatest need from federal or state governments, followed by flexibility on regulatory limitations regarding remote learning (58 percent) and a mental health resource allocation for students (41 percent, up from 33 percent in the March survey).

■ **Assistance from other sources.**

Campus leaders continued to list "financial health and operational planning" as the top area in which their institution could benefit from outside operational support to navigate through the COVID-19 crisis. But they cited two areas much more in April than they did in May -- strengthening the perception of their institution's brand and institutional partnerships. The latter suggests that presidents are increasingly seeing the need and value of collaborating with peer institutions, which many experts have encouraged. ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/survey/presidents-biggest-covid-19-worries-low-income-students-and-colleges-financial-strain>

ADMISSIONS AND FINANCE

Key Takeaways:

- Colleges and universities large and small have turned to hiring freezes, salary reductions, furloughs and layoffs to combat a crunch caused by mounting expenses and uncertain revenue prospects.
- Early indicators show many families and students are unwilling to pay full price if classes aren't on campus.
- A large number of students and parents believe they're owed refunds for tuition, fees and room and board after institutions switched to remote learning.
- Lawyers are hoping to capitalize on dissatisfaction, making arguments including that some universities offer online programs for less money than they charge for in-person counterparts.
- Data suggest students may be rethinking their college decisions, setting up a very unsettled spring, summer and fall.
- Admissions experts fear uncertainty will drive students to walk away from deposits, enroll in lower numbers and increase summer melt.
- A handful of institutions took pricing actions like tuition freezes, deferred payment plans and even tuition cuts, adding pressure on college pricing.
- Short-term and long-term ramifications vary the longer the coronavirus crisis continues.

Here Come the Furloughs

Sharp reductions in revenue and potential increases in expenses are spurring colleges to furlough or lay off employees while they wait for the coronavirus outbreak and the uncertainty it brings to subside.

By **Emma Whitford** // April 10, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/WILLSELAREP

First came the hiring freezes. Now come the furloughs.

Several colleges announced furloughs and layoffs this week and warned of potential additional staff reductions in the weeks to come. As colleges field unexpected expenses and lost revenue due to the coronavirus outbreak, paying employees -- especially those who are unable to do their jobs remotely -- is becoming more difficult.

MaryAnn Baenninger, president of Drew University, announced via video message on Sunday that a group of about 70 employees would be furloughed through at least the end of May. A smaller group will be laid off permanently. Furloughed staff members were notified Monday.

"I can't guarantee that some of these furloughs won't transition to

permanent layoffs in the future," Baenninger said in the video. According to the Drew website, furloughed employees will be updated by May 26 on the status of their furlough.

Staff reductions had been on the table for weeks while the Drew virtual team -- the group appointed to bring Drew online and weather the outbreak -- considered how to balance the needs of the university and what was best for employees.

The decision was, in part, an equity issue, Baenninger said.

"There were people who were working harder than they ever worked ... and there were people for whom we wanted to have work, but we didn't," she said.

The financial picture Baenninger painted for Drew is similar to those at many other colleges and univer-

sities. She cited lost revenue from events, conferences, catering, summer camps and other operations, diminished endowment returns, and reduced giving from alumni and donors.

"On the expense side," she continued in the video, "we will need to be prepared for potential changes in student financial aid, likely increases in health insurance costs, and we have had significant unexpected increases transitioning to a virtual environment, responding to the myriad changes brought on by COVID-19 and the potential need if called upon by the state of New Jersey to prepare our campus to house first responders and displaced medical patients."

When colleges are forced to consider budget cuts, administrative costs such as travel and expense

Here Come the Furloughs (cont.)

funds are typically the first to go, according to Ken Rodgers, director at S&P Global. Hiring freezes come next, which result in "a reasonable amount of savings," he said. If that's not enough, pay reductions, furloughs and layoffs become viable expense-saving options.

Baenninger and her team are considering salary reductions.

"We were pretty certain that salary reductions wouldn't preclude a furlough, but maybe a furlough would prevent some salary reductions," she said in an interview.

Drew had already experienced financial struggles in recent years. But it is not alone in feeling increased pressure that forces furloughs amid the coronavirus.

The University of New Haven -- which is expecting a \$12 million to \$15 million in revenue loss due to issuing student refunds and credits -- announced across-the-board pay reductions for faculty and staff two weeks ago. Last week, the university announced that some employees would be furloughed.

Furloughs are sometimes used as defensive measures, Rodgers said. They can better position colleges should their financial situations get worse, "i.e., this fall, if it turns out that students, for whatever reason, don't come back."

Guilford College in North Carolina has furloughed 133 people, more than half of its nonfaculty

employees.

"Many of the jobs that we were looking at were really the jobs that couldn't be done from home, because they involved direct contact with students," said Jane Fernandes, president of Guilford. "We decided that just to help -- not to solve anything -- but to help our budget get to the end of the year, we would furlough staff."

Marquette University announced Wednesday it would furlough approximately 250 employees beginning in mid-April. Bob Jones University, a private evangelical university in Greenville, S.C., also announced Wednesday that about 50 employees would be furloughed, with the potential for more down the road.

The furloughs don't appear to be cutting into faculty ranks at this time, although faculty numbers are likely to be affected by already announced hiring freezes, reductions in pay and other actions at colleges and universities around the country.

The first round of furloughs and layoffs is typically operationally easier on colleges, Rodgers said.

"Those initial layoffs and furloughs typically are -- you have to be careful when you say this -- not too difficult for the university to administer," Rodgers said. "If you get into the situation where a lot of students choose not to come back to campus and you have to implement a more broad-based reduction, that

would be more challenging for any university to implement ... because then you have to cut into core programming."

Employees who work on campus for third-party vendors that contract with colleges are also being laid off. Bon Appétit Management Company, which provides dining services to many colleges around the country, has furloughed many of its employees. Contract workers are not usually considered employees of the college they work at, and they face an uncertain future until students return to campus.

Colleges are borrowing money to bolster their cash positions, but not to support recurring operations, including payroll, Rodgers said.

"We view unfavorably any organization that borrows money to support recurring operations, including for payroll purposes," he continued.

June is likely to be a key decision point on future furloughs and layoffs, Rodgers said, because the June 30 end of the fiscal year will be approaching. Colleges will be working out their budgets for the new 2021 fiscal year.

"They're trying to see how this is going to impact their fiscal '21 budget," he said. "They're having to make assumptions that may be very difficult to make as far as what enrollment to anticipate under scenario one, scenario two, scenario three." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/10/colleges-announce-furloughs-and-layoffs-financial-challenges-mount>

Students Turn to Courts for Refunds

At least five institutions and university systems are facing class action lawsuits filed by students who want refunds on spring semester tuition and other fees.

By **Greta Anderson** // April 20, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/FTWITTY

“Are you a college student who was forced to leave campus? You may be entitled to compensation,” a notice on collegerefund2020.com announces.

The website was created by a law firm currently capitalizing on the growing anger and activism by students -- and indignant parents, too -- who believe they're owed partial tuition and fee refunds for semesters cut short, courses moved online and off-campus, and unused housing and meal plans, among other disruptions that occurred at colleges and universities across the country in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The advertisement by the Anas-topoulos Law Firm, which has offices throughout South Carolina, appears to have struck a chord. It is currently representing students in

three class action lawsuits filed in the last two weeks against Drexel University, University of Miami and the Board of Regents of the University of Colorado, as calls from students for tuition and fee refunds grow stronger.

The lawsuits claim that online classes don't have equal value to in-person classes and are not worth the tuition that students paid for on-campus classes. The lawsuits also contend that the decision by these institutions to use pass/fail grading systems this semester have diminished the value of the degrees they offer. The lawsuits claim they represent thousands of students enrolled at the universities.

Separate class action lawsuits against the Arizona Board of Regents and Liberty University were

filed on behalf of students that attend one of the three institutions in the Arizona university system or the Christian liberal arts university in Lynchburg, Va. The lawsuits claim students paid various fees -- recreation, health services, room and board, and meal plans -- for resources they did not use after college administrators shut down campuses to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Students demanded universities return any "unused" fees, "proportionate to the amount of time that remained in the spring 2020 semester when classes moved online," according to the Arizona lawsuit.

Liberty, which allowed students to return to campus following the university's spring break, is providing \$1,000 to students who moved out of its campus residence halls, ac-

Students Turn to Courts for Refunds (cont.)

According to a university spokesman. The lawsuit against the university is “without merit,” Scott Lamb, senior vice president of communications and public engagement, said in a written statement.

“While it’s not surprising that plaintiff class action attorneys would seek to profit from a public health crisis, we don’t believe this law firm or its single client speaks for the vast majority of our students,” the statement said. “Similar class-action suits are pending against other schools, and such claims will no doubt be made against other higher education institutions that changed how they operate and deliver services to students in the face of COVID-19.”

The five universities named in the lawsuits are committing “breach of contract” and receiving “unjust enrichment” from tuition and fee payments that won’t go toward services that benefit students, according to the lawsuits. The universities have failed to deliver on promises of in-person instruction and campus life, which the University of Miami touts as “a world of interaction with other students” and Drexel promotes as “experiential learning,” according to the lawsuits filed in the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina, Charleston division. Grainger Rickenkaker, who attends Drexel, and Adelaide Dixon, a student at Miami, both live in South Carolina, and did not reply to requests for comment sent through Facebook.

Roy Willey IV, a lawyer with the Anastopoulos Law Firm, said in an email that the firm is investigating “dozens” of other potential cases across the country where students claim colleges owe them refunds. The firm created collegerefund2020.com because it is receiving numerous inquiries for

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There’s no way schools are saving a boatload of money now that they’ve sent students home for the remainder of the year.

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legal representation, he said.

“This is a national problem where colleges and universities with endowments in the hundreds of millions and even billions of dollars are passing the entire burden of the pandemic onto students and their families,” Willey wrote. “That is not fair, it is not right, and they should be held accountable.”

He pointed to the significant price differences between some online and in-person classes as examples of the lower costs of providing online instruction. For example, he noted that tuition for Drexel’s online bachelor’s degree program in business administration is 40 percent less than the rate for the on-campus program.

An updated version of the Arizona lawsuit filed on April 15 names eight students. An anonymous student filed the Liberty lawsuit. Matt Miller, an attorney whose firm is representing Liberty and Arizona students, said the anonymous Liberty student is worried about retaliation from officials for speaking out against the university.

The anonymous student said Liberty’s response to the pandemic is “irresponsible and dangerous” because it offered students the

choice to return to residence halls, Miller explained in an email.

Liberty and Arizona’s coronavirus responses were unique among others because they made the “same bad decision” to leave campuses open and left it up to students to decide whether to return, Miller said. Students at the universities Miller is representing are not seeking reimbursement for tuition, rather, they want refunds of any unused fees for on-campus services. He said it is “indefensible” for universities to hold on to fees for services which they are not providing.

“The cases that we have filed, these are not meant to be punitive to the schools,” Miller said. “People have paid for something and you’re not providing it in a very clear way ... Colleges are already really expensive. Families are taking on massive debt or pour their life savings into going to college.”

Northern Arizona University, which is part of the state system, says in its coronavirus response posted on the university’s website that students who moved off campus by April 16 will receive a 25 percent refund for spring housing and meal plans. A spokesman for Arizona State University said a

Students Turn to Courts for Refunds (cont.)

\$1,500 credit will be applied for “eligible” students who moved out of on-campus housing by April 15, but housing remains open and some resources are still being provided, such as telehealth for medical and counseling services. A spokesperson for the Arizona Board of Regents did not respond to a request for comment.

Peter McDonough, vice president and general counsel for the American Council on Education, said while it’s reasonable for students to ask whether they’re getting what they paid for, institutions are also facing financial hardship due to the pandemic. The assumption of “unjust enrichment claims” -- that colleges are saving money by not having students on campus -- is inaccurate, said McDonough, who

is the former counsel to Princeton University.

“There’s no way schools are saving a boatload of money now that they’ve sent students home for the remainder of the year,” McDonough said. “A typical college’s expenses weigh heavily toward paying faculty and staff. I hope we appreciate that schools are trying to carry, the best they can, their employees, and particularly the ones that are most economically challenged.”

Colorado faculty members at the system’s four campuses have been working hard to ensure on-line coursework has the “same academic rigor and high quality” as it did before the pandemic, said Ken McConnellogue, vice president for communication for the system’s president. Colorado and other uni-

versities have stressed that students will continue to receive academic credit for their courses taken this semester.

“It’s disappointing that people feel compelled to sue amid a global pandemic, barely a month after we moved to remote teaching to protect the health and safety of students, faculty and staff,” McConnellogue said.

McDonough said he could not predict whether the current lawsuits might prompt more students to seek refunds through legal channels.

“I frankly hope that we don’t have to play all of that out,” McDonough said. “I hope that students and their families will have a look back and [feel] appreciation for everything institutions did do to help them through this.” ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/20/students-sue-universities-tuition-and-fee-refunds>

Pricing Pressures Escalate

The second economic crisis in a dozen years could take a bite out of colleges' ability to set prices, but pressures were mounting long before the coronavirus arrived.

By **Rick Seltzer** // April 27, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/JCJGPHOTOGRAPHY

The coronavirus outbreak placed sudden downward pressure on the price of attending college this spring, as students being sent home from on-campus programs demanded room and board refunds and in some cases filed lawsuits seeking partial tuition rebates.

At first glance, it may look like a short-term disruption that will resolve itself once the public health threat is over and students can go back to campus. Some of the immediate pricing pressure stems from questions about whether students are willing to pay as much for temporary online substitutes as they will for an in-person education.

But as the crisis stretches on and prospects for in-person education this fall remain shrouded in uncertainty, it's becoming increasingly clear that the pandemic is exacerbating a larger squeeze on college prices.

Even before the coronavirus hit, many colleges and universities were finding it difficult to collect enough money from students to meet rising costs. The traditional bread and butter for four-year campuses, wealthy white high school graduates, were expected to decline in number in parts of the country in coming years. And many families struggled to pay full price for big-ticket items like higher education after the uneven recovery from the Great Recession failed to lift all incomes equally.

Now, families face a second massive economic disruption in a dozen years, even as colleges don't know when they'll be able to say for sure whether they will be continuing remote education in the fall

or bringing students back on campus. Speculation runs rampant that student behavior will change, with some sitting out the year and others enrolling in low-cost options or colleges close to home.

The disruption comes shortly after a federal investigation prompted changes to admissions counselors' code of ethics -- changes that on their own were expected to significantly increase recruiting competition. That leaves many colleges scrambling to provide financial aid packages large enough to keep existing students enrolled or to convince new students to enroll for the first time in the fall, whether or not campuses open.

"We're just being inundated with conversations coming at us in waves," said Bill Hall, founder and president of Applied Policy Re-

Pricing Pressures Escalate (cont.)

search Inc., a consulting firm based in Minnesota. “What do we do about the rest of the spring term? How do we prepare ourselves for any wave of money which we’re adding into packaging? Then what are the criteria we use for taking an appeal?’ And then, finally, we’re at the point where people are asking, ‘What if this goes into the fall?’”

Last week, the pricing pressures burst into full view as several colleges and universities across the country announced actions ranging from tuition freezes to steep cuts to options allowing students to defer tuition payments until well after the fall semester.

The College of William & Mary announced it would roll back a planned 3 percent increase for new in-state undergraduates arriving in fall 2020. Instead, the prestigious college in Virginia expects to hold tuition and mandatory fees unchanged for all students next year. Halfway across the country, Kansas City University took a similar step, announcing a tuition freeze and killing its own planned 3 percent tuition increase.

Christopher Newport University in Virginia announced it will not increase tuition, fees and room and board for 2020-21. Delaware Valley University in Pennsylvania froze undergraduate tuition and fees.

The University System of Maine launched a program targeted at students affected by the coronavirus outbreak. Under the program, called the Maine Welcome, the system promised resident tuition status to “any successful U.S. college student or law student displaced by a COVID-19-related permanent closure of a U.S. institution of higher education.” In Ohio, Franciscan University of Steubenville rolled out a plan covering 100 percent of fall 2020 tuition for new on-campus

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We’re at the point
where people are asking,
‘What if this goes into the fall?’

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undergraduates, after scholarships and grants.

Davidson College in North Carolina unveiled an option allowing students and families to defer payment for the fall semester for up to a year. The prominent college in North Carolina will issue bills for the fall semester in July, but all students except for seniors will be able to defer payment until August 2021. Seniors who are graduating next spring will be able to defer until April 1.

Perhaps more significant than any other move was one announced by Southern New Hampshire University, a private nonprofit with massive online enrollment and scale.

It announced plans to cut tuition for campus-based learning models by 61 percent by 2021, down to \$10,000 per year. Southern New Hampshire is also offering scholarships for all incoming freshmen enrolling on campus that will cover the full cost of their first-year tuition.

Those incoming freshmen are expected to live on campus but take courses online, allowing them to participate in the experiential side of the institution. Then they

can continue with the \$10,000 on-campus rate in their sophomore years, when new models based on online, hybrid or project-based modalities are expected to be ready.

‘We’re Looking at Everything’

Southern New Hampshire University looks like few others because of its size, scale and online capabilities. In normal times, the private nonprofit reported 3,000 on-campus students and 135,000 students studying online.

That massive enrollment helps make possible pricing experiments that might be difficult for smaller colleges and universities. Still, Southern New Hampshire’s tuition changes are connected to the larger environment.

The university is acknowledging that freshmen are enrolling in an uncertain time by providing full-tuition scholarships for those enrolling in on-campus programs this fall.

“We really de-risk for those first-year students,” said Paul LeBlanc, Southern New Hampshire’s president. “We think this turns out to be exactly the right strategy at exactly the right time.”

Southern New Hampshire had been working toward rolling out the

Pricing Pressures Escalate (cont.)

new model in 2023, LeBlanc said. Then the pandemic hit. Current high school seniors don't have the luxury of waiting a few years, so the university accelerated its plans.

"It's not our timing of choice, but it's what we need to do," LeBlanc said. "This is not a response to the challenges of September 2020. It's actually much more a response to the recession and this astonishing level of unemployment."

LeBlanc cautions against seeing Southern New Hampshire's announcement solely as a single-year pricing move. It's paired with significant efforts to improve pedagogy and rethink assumptions about the way on-campus education works. Even though it's being put in place on an accelerated schedule, the university has been laying the groundwork for quite some time.

"We're looking at everything," LeBlanc said. "We're looking at the whole student life cycle. How do we leverage the kind of technology and platforms that we've built? How do we think differently about the structure and term of the academic year? Could we move to a 12-month academic year? Could we contemplate the student going around the calendar and graduating in two years, which removes two years of opportunity costs?"

That parallels something experts often say about pricing conversations: a college's price is best considered in concert with market position, long-term strategy and developments in the broader higher education environment.

"There is downward pressure on pricing, but what we're seeing is that what each institution should do is idiosyncratically different from what every other institution should do," said David Strauss, a principal at Art & Science Group, a Baltimore-based consulting firm. "If

you can't afford to study and get the right answer, it's usually the wrong answer over the long term."

'You Have to Be a Very Good Listener to the Market'

Signs of pricing pressure existed long before the coronavirus crisis exposed them.

The National Association of College and University Business Officers conducts an annual Tuition Discounting Study that looks at the sticker prices four-year private non-profit colleges and universities post, the amount of financial aid they provide and the tuition discount rates that reveal what percentage of sticker prices institutions never actually collect from students. That study has also examined net tuition revenue -- the amount of money institutions do collect from students.

Net tuition revenue was largely flat in recent years, according to the 2018 discounting study, the most recent available. Across all types of private institutions in the study, net revenue per first-time, full-time freshman rose by just 0.4 percent without adjusting for inflation in 2018-19. It fell by 0.8 percent in 2017-18.

"I think there's been downward pressure on price now for some years," LeBlanc said. "It's been a little bit masked for many privates because of the way it's manifested in the discount rate. They have been effectively lowering their price without saying it publicly across many institutions."

Even so, the current crisis is accelerating that pressure. Research is showing that students and families are thinking about staying closer to home than they normally would, according to Stephanie Dupaul, vice president for enrollment management at the University of Richmond.

"This is already the safety-

focused generation; this will just increase that focus," she said in an email. "And cost has become a significant factor as these high school students are now watching their parents go through a second economic crisis."

Even well-off students seem likely to try to minimize risks in this environment, said Allen Koh, CEO of Cardinal Education, an education consulting firm that caters to wealthy families seeking admission to elite institutions.

"You're going to start seeing an unprecedented number of kids who are going to college in the fall who will do summer school at a community college to try to get some general education requirements cheaply," he said. "You're going to see a lot more students take three years to graduate, and you may even see this impact medical schools and law schools."

Different admissions officers and experts have theorized that well-off families could hedge their bets by putting down deposits at multiple colleges. Doing so would allow them to select the best option of price, prestige and location once the extent of pandemic-related shutdowns becomes clear for the fall, all while dodging traditional spring commitment deadlines.

It would also throw enrollment, yield and summer melt models into disarray over the summer, leaving some colleges without their most lucrative students on short notice.

Some experts also believe gap years could become more popular if students don't want to take the risk of enrolling at all in an uncertain environment. Other students may scrap all plans to attend college, particularly if mounting financial troubles make higher education seem unattainable for first-generation students or those with little

Pricing Pressures Escalate (cont.)

savings. Data show declining completion rates for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, indicating that at least some students may be rethinking college attendance next year.

At the same time, students who would have been likely to attend prestigious second-tier institutions are now focused on entering the Ivy League, Koh said. Families that continue to have a large amount of wealth -- those that pay the full cost of tuition -- are always sought after. But they're even more valuable to colleges today, when less wealthy students have larger financial needs and rising coronavirus-related costs are stretching budgets across the board.

In other words, wealthy families suddenly enjoy even more leverage than they had before. The most prestigious institutions in the country are most able to choose their students, so they are most able to shield themselves from pricing pressures.

"Very prestigious schools and schools with strong endowments, they won't do anything on pricing for at least this admissions cycle, maybe two," Koh said. "It's hard to raise prices after a massive deduction. Plus, universities just have too many fixed costs."

Still, universities of all types could feel at least a net revenue pinch because of uncertainty in international student enrollment. As wealth levels and the number of traditional high school graduates have leveled off in the United States, many colleges and universities leaned heavily on international enrollment, which produces a large number of students paying high prices.

Now, Koh asks if international students will be able to fly to the United States to attend college in the fall. Will the federal government

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It's hard to raise prices
after a massive deduction.

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grant them visas? Will they want to come?

All those pressures translate to difficulty for institutions that would normally be considered safe from enrollment and pricing shocks. That makes moves such as Davidson's tuition deferral worth watching closely.

The deferral option at Davidson applies to tuition and fees as well as room and board for the fall. All or part of family contributions can be postponed. Davidson left open the possibility of expanding the deferred tuition option to the spring 2021 semester.

A Davidson spokesman declined to provide any estimates of financial costs associated with the deferral option being offered to students because of uncertainty. In emailed responses to questions, he emphasized the college's community.

"The option to defer fall tuition springs from the sense of community that makes Davidson distinctive," the spokesman wrote. "We share in each other's celebrations and support each other in our struggles. This is an expression of who we are. The option to defer payments is an act to help our students and their families, to make it

easier for students to return to -- or start -- their educational experience at Davidson."

Depending on how it's structured, such a deferral program could carry risks for students, families and colleges. It could mean families facing not one but two tuition bills next year, experts pointed out. If families can't pay, any college offering a deferral plan will be left with a financial hit.

Even so, it's one way to shift billing and address short-term market shocks.

Other colleges and universities that rely on the on-campus experience to attract students may not have the financial resources to spot families the cost of tuition for a significant period of time. Tuition-dependent small private liberal arts colleges that tout small class sizes and intimate campuses are scattered across the country. What happens if they're unable to leverage that close community to attract new students in the fall?

What happens if the pandemic prevents students from returning to campus in the fall, prompting rising sophomores or juniors not to re-enroll? What if those students reason that paying a liberal arts tui-

Pricing Pressures Escalate (cont.)

tion for an online experience makes no sense when they can just as easily pay a lower price point at a fully online college?

Melody Rose was the president of Marylhurst University outside of Portland, Ore., when it closed in 2018. She is now working on a book tentatively titled *Achieving Graceful Transitions in Higher Education* and is a senior consultant for the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

"I think if you're a small private or public regional institution without a lot of investment capacity in an online pivot, and the very reason people select you -- the community, the intimacy of small in-person classes -- is gone, then you may be facing an existential crisis by fall of 2020," Rose said.

Should the coronavirus force campuses to remain closed in the fall, long-term questions about pricing pressure may fade into the background in lieu of the newly burning question of for what, exactly, students at traditional campuses were really paying. Was it credit hours or the full in-person experience, rich with living among fellow students, taking part in activities and receiving a full slate of support services?

As much as some administrators may want to argue that students will be willing to pay full cost for a short-term remote learning substitute, the spate of class action lawsuits filed after students were sent home this spring suggests other scenarios.

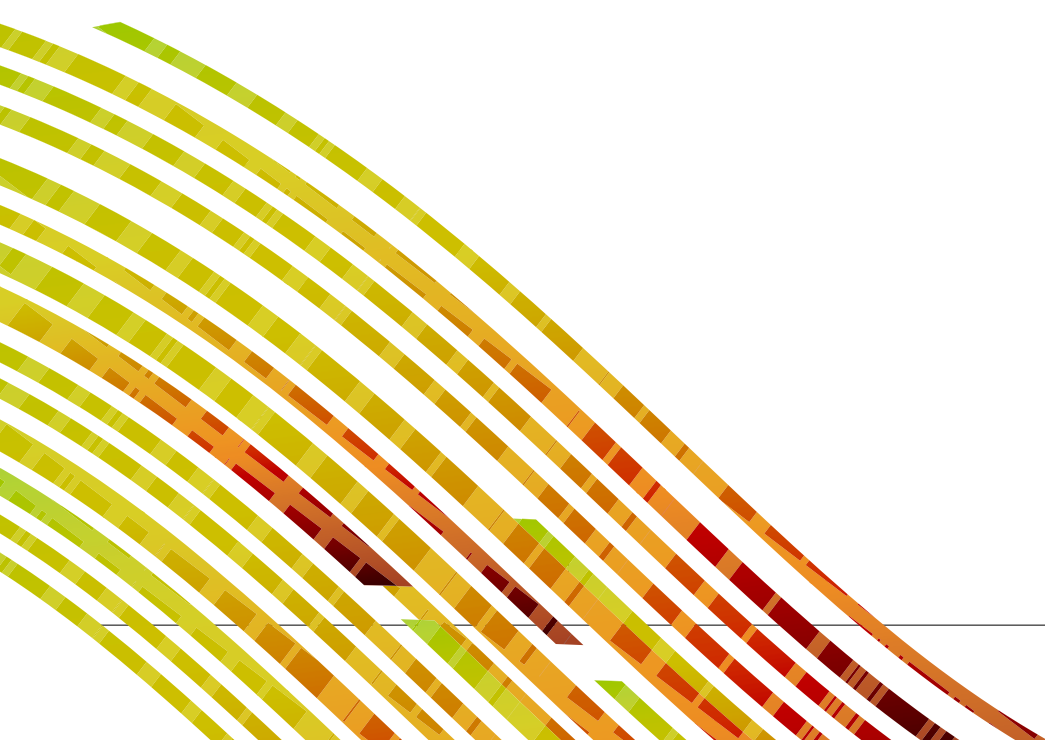
For now, however, that question

remains part of a larger environment of uncertainty that continues as spring admissions season enters its critical phase. Hundreds of universities have postponed decision day, when deposits are due, from May 1 to June 1. Coming days and weeks will still be crunch time, when many high school seniors will decide where to attend college after summer's end.

"It's difficult to feel very confident about how some of these key value points might play out, and that's especially true in that competition for students," said Peter Stokes, managing director at the consulting firm Huron's education strategy and operations group. "You have to be a very good listener to the market in order to compete effectively in a highly dynamic situation." ■

[Read Original Article](#) ▶▶

<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/27/tuition-freezes-and-cuts-show-colleges-and-universities-are-face-downward-price>



STUDENTS

Key Takeaways:

- Students suddenly learning remotely may be juggling family needs like childcare, eldercare or financial pressures.
- Advocates say students with disabilities have been placed on the back burner amid the scramble to transfer teaching to remote and digital formats.
- The pandemic has shown that colleges and universities can meet the needs of students with disabilities who may want accommodations like learning remotely. But it also raises the question of why some institutions haven't been accommodating in the past.
- Some worry that students with real need to stay on campus through coronavirus shutdowns had applications to remain arbitrarily rejected.
- Students remaining on campuses that haven't set clear plans for summer housing express apprehension.
- Many institutions have adopted liberal pass/fail grading structures to shield students from the possibility that coronavirus-related disruptions could hit their grade point averages.
- It remains unclear how admissions officers will weigh pass/fail grades from this semester, which could disrupt admissions at all levels of higher ed.

Accessibility Suffers During Pandemic

Students with disabilities and their advocates say access to equitable education has been abandoned in the scramble to move classes online.

By **Greta Anderson** // April 6, 2020

In the quick shift by colleges from in-person to online instruction in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the needs of students with disabilities can sometimes be overlooked.

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing, have low vision or are blind, those with learning disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or a physical disability that requires use of a computer keyboard instead of a mouse, students with mental illnesses or various other challenges, have been put on the backburner “en masse,” as instructors scramble to transfer two months’ worth of teaching content to a digital format, said Cyndi Wiley, digital accessibility coordinator for Iowa State University’s Information Technology Services.

Wiley said although some faculty members may have discussed digital accessibility in the past, they might not be aware of the importance of ensuring it for all students and may not understand that it goes beyond making special accommodations for individual students that specifically request it. Some faculty members might just be overwhelmed by the pressure to rapidly convert to online classes and overlook accessibility, Wiley said. She said institutions can and should “do better” by making investments in software that continuously provides alternative, accessible material formats for students with any disabilities.

“I would love to live in a world where we didn’t have to make accommodations because all our



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/SKYNESHER

materials are just accessible,” Wiley said. “If we are not at an enterprise level looking at those resources and creating budget lines, we’re at the situation we’re in now. We have some how-to resources and tips, but faculty are running all over the place and trying to keep up with students.”

The National Federation of the Blind has been contacted by college students facing problems after complete shifts to remote learning by their respective institutions, said Chris Danielsen, director of pub-

lic relations for the federation. The primary issue for blind students is learning materials not being compatible with screen readers, which read and navigate course documents and sometimes transcribe them into Braille, he said.

“What we worry about now is that in the rush to move everything online in light of COVID-19, universities are paying even less attention to whether it’s accessible or not,” Danielsen said.

Tiffany Anderson, a blind student

Accessibility Suffers During Pandemic (cont.)

in her final semester at Johnston Community College in Smithfield, N.C., said the move to online learning has slowed her down. When her Spanish conversation class was in person, Anderson could listen to readings and follow along, but a digital textbook for the course is not available in an online format compatible with her screen reader, and her professor has been relying on that textbook more for assignments, she said.

"It's stressful, because you feel like you're falling behind," Anderson said.

Wiley said students who are dyslexic, on the autism spectrum or who have a learning disability that requires text be read to them can also run into problems when screen readers process documents that are images instead of text. Images also cannot be navigated by students with physical disabilities who only use computer keyboards, not mice, to go through documents, she said.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students may also face new challenges, said Howard Rosenblum, CEO of the National Association of the Deaf.

Live teaching formats over the internet may not provide them with American Sign Language interpreters or real-time captioning – transcriptions of speech produced by a person, not computer-generated – they may have had in in-person classes. If students had these services provided in the classroom, they should be duplicated for remote learning, Rosenblum said in an email. Colleges should not look to automated speech recognition, or ASR, software for live video formats, such as what is provided as a default for the Zoom, WebEx and Google Hangout conferencing platforms, he said.

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For students ... to be locked out of education is just devastating.

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"Such captioning is generally subpar and would be a disservice to those who rely on accurate captioning to understand and follow their college classes," Rosenblum said. "We challenge any claim of accuracy measurements of ASR given that there is absolutely no valid metric to assess the accuracy of captioning at this time."

Captioning accuracy declines when the speaker's native language is not English or if they have a speech impediment, when live video has background noise or complex terminology or bad internet connections, Rosenblum said. Wiley estimated that the ASR used in videoconferencing platforms is 85 to 90 percent accurate, when the aim should be 99 percent accuracy. The best-case scenario would be for colleges to have a human remote live captioner, but academic departments often don't have the budget to pay for such services, especially now with the financial impact of making major adjustments in response to the public health crisis, Wiley said.

The pandemic is forcing institutions "to confront who is expendable," said Mary Vargas, a partner at the firm Stein & Vargas LLP, who

focuses on disability discrimination and is a former attorney with the NAD. Accessibility issues occurring now will impact the deaf community later, as deaf and hard-of-hearing students studying health care or medicine will become critical providers who can communicate effectively with other deaf and hard-of-hearing people, she said.

"For students in that field to be locked out of education is just devastating," Vargas said. "It's devastating to their career path and devastating to the rest of us who need immediate health-care access."

People who have not paid attention to accessibility are now being forced to in the middle of a crisis, said Lainey Feingold, a disability rights attorney who works on digital accessibility. From a legal standpoint, the technology should always be usable for every student, and accommodations are required by law, unless it's an "undue burden," she said. But providing an equal education to students with disabilities should be more than just a "checklist" to ensure institutions are compliant with federal requirements, Feingold said.

Accessibility should be a "state of mind," and that has not historically

Accessibility Suffers During Pandemic (cont.)

been the case in higher education, said Marion Quirici, a disability studies professor at Duke University who advises the Duke Disability Alliance, a student group that advocates for visibility and accessibility for students with disabilities. Quirici is concerned not only for the students who have disclosed disabilities previously to their professors, or who have very apparent physical disabilities, but those who have not asked for accommodations, especially for unpredictable learning or mental health disabilities, she said.

"Accommodation is first -- you have to prove you have a disability," Quirici said. "You go through this process of documentation, then decide which accommodation would help you get through this course ... The students who are struggling the most are students whose disabilities are not already on the books."

The move to remote learning has been particularly difficult for Sydney Aquilina, a Duke student who has ADHD and is a member of the DDA. Attending classes remotely while living in a household with seven others is challenging, she said in an email. It's hard to find quiet space to be productive.

"Not being in-person in and of itself makes it harder to concentrate, and I feel less free to ask the questions that my mind will get hung up on, which makes it even more diffi-

cult to focus on what I'm supposed to," Aquilina said. "Conversation helps me organize and process my thoughts, so the reduction of social interaction makes it more difficult for me to articulate my thoughts and ideas on assignments."

Online learning, when done in an accessible way, can be better for some students with disabilities, such as those who struggle to navigate campus because they have a physical disability, Quirici said. What the coronavirus pandemic has revealed, though, is that requests by students with disabilities to learn remotely in the past -- which were sometimes rejected at many universities -- are suddenly possible on a broad scale, Quirici said.

This is the "irony of this current crisis," Deanna Ferrante, a December graduate of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, wrote in an article about the pandemic. Ferrante founded the Alliance Against Ableism at UMass Amherst and said she has a learning disability that affects her reading comprehension and memory.

"In the past, students who need class content to be moved online have faced opposition from administration claiming that the transition would be too expensive, take too much time, and require too much extra training for educators," Ferrante wrote. "It is painful

to me and many others in the disability community that as soon as non-disabled people require the use of online classes to complete their education, the whole world scrambles to get everything running in a mere week."

Sometimes there's a reluctance from educators to provide accommodations because they're skeptical of a legitimate need that is not obviously visible, when the attitude should be "flexibility and understanding," Quirici said. There is a lesson to learn from people with disabilities who are "coming forward as leaders during this transition" and speaking about inequities that persist in higher education, not just online, but in person, Quirici said.

"That flexibility and approachability should be built into our mission as teachers," she said. "I hope that one silver lining of this catastrophe is that this is all possible and it can be incorporated into face-to-face environments."

Ferrante said accessibility should not be framed as "guidelines" or "suggestions" for instructors but as a top-down mandate from university administrators.

"It's very disheartening that now all of this immediacy is in place because of something's that's bigger than all of us," Ferrante said. "Maybe it will show universities and administrators the importance of this." ■

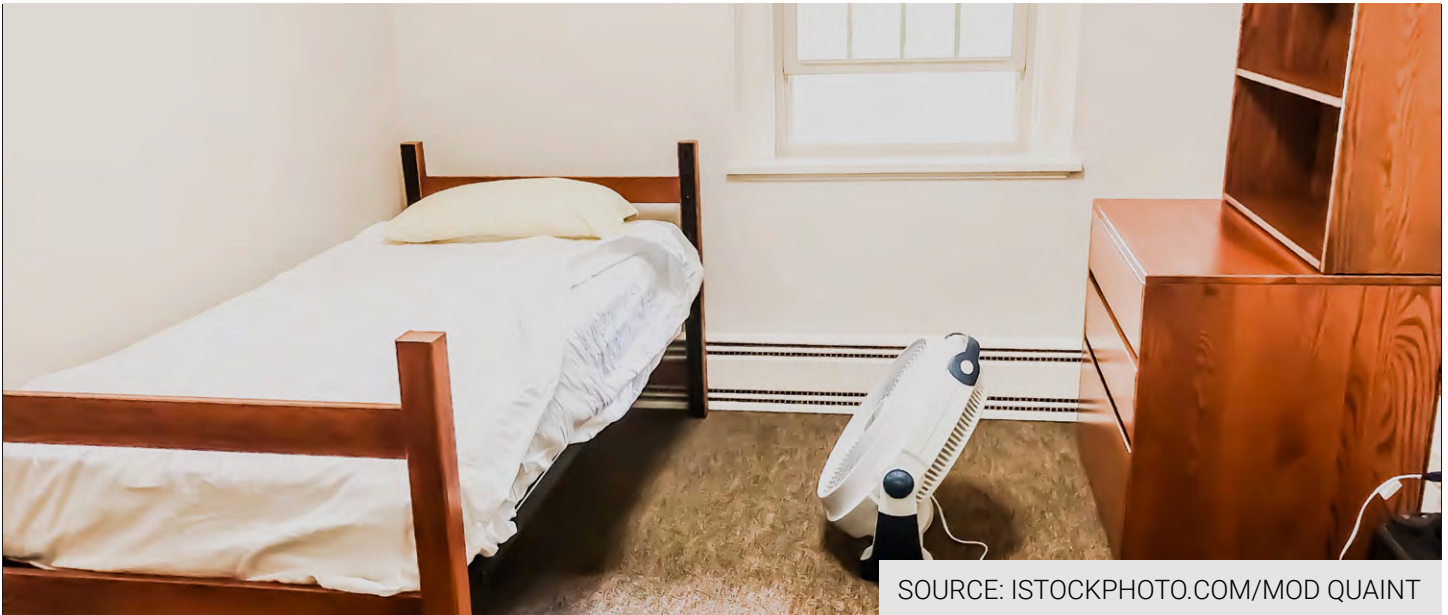
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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/06/remote-learning-shift-leaves-students-disabilities-behind>

Students Remaining on Campus See 'A Ghost Town'

Far from the party atmosphere some observers may have feared, the students who remain on campus say the experience is, if anything, isolating.

By **Lilah Burke** // April 20, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MOD QUAINT

Most students have left campus now. Aside from a couple of exceptions, such as the University of Washington and Long Island University, colleges have closed residences to stop spread of the new coronavirus. Students now need permission to stay on campus.

But many students who applied were not allowed to stay, said Chris Sinclair, executive director of external affairs at FLIP National, a non-profit that supports first-generation and low-income students.

"What they won't acknowledge," Sinclair said, making an example of the University of Pennsylvania, "is nearly everyone who applied to stay in campus housing because they couldn't afford to leave was rejected with no appeals process."

Penn, for its part, has emphasized that students who were not permit-

ted to stay were offered generous financial assistance. "Penn has approved and distributed emergency funds to nearly 500 undergraduate students," a spokesperson for the university said via email. "This funding was targeted specifically to students who were not approved to remain on campus but indicated in their application that they had financial concerns that would prevent their immediate departure." The university bought plane tickets, arranged ground transportation and covered baggage costs. Many students who receive aid from the university are now receiving additional financial assistance to ensure food security and internet service for the rest of the semester, the university has said.

Just how many students were permitted to stay obviously varies

by institution. Some are hosting many students. At the State University of New York at Buffalo, 1,500 of the usual 8,000 students have been allowed to remain on campus. International students, as well as students who can't make safe living or dining arrangements, who have limited access to technology, or whose primary residence is campus, were all allowed to stay. The criteria were decided with guidance from the governor and system chancellor. In contrast, at Georgetown University, which has nearly 7,000 undergraduates, dining workers have said the campus is only hosting about 200 students, mostly international.

At Chapman University, the campus was set to house 3,450 students this spring. Now there are only about 230 left, said Dave

Students Remaining on Campus See 'A Ghost Town' (cont.)

Sundby, director of residence life. There are some students, he said, who might have been able to go home in early March when the pandemic was just beginning but now have family infected or in vulnerable situations.

Sundby said the administration first pared down applications to stay by asking some students for more information.

"We initially had students who thought, 'This will be great! No classes and I just get to party in the neighborhood all the time,'" he said. "We did tell some people, 'What you've provided isn't really enough information,' or 'If this is your only reason for being here, we're going to need to ask you to move out.'"

But the further information some students provided made it obvious that they needed to stay. Some students didn't have beds to sleep in or lived at home with vulnerable family members.

Still, students at other institutions are concerned that their peers have fallen through the cracks.

Anna Macknick, a junior studying linguistics at Princeton University, said that students have been posting on anonymous Facebook pages about the struggles they faced after leaving campus.

"A lot of people have been posting about going home to abusive families, to toxic environments, to not having reliable Wi-Fi," she said. "People were screwed over by the policies that Princeton made, or failed to make."

Princeton was specific in its criteria for which students were allowed to stay. Originally, only those completing thesis research, facing housing or financial insecurity, or residing in university family housing were allowed to stay, along with some international students and those that have been granted sta-

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No one knows if there's going to be summer housing or not.

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tus as independent from their parents. Students can apply for independent status, meaning they are not financially dependent on their parents, if they have experienced documented parental abuse or neglect, or meet other criteria such as being married.

Having a generally strained relationship with family or unreliable internet access were not listed as approved reasons for domestic students to stay on campus.

A Princeton spokesperson said that the university reviewed over 1,000 requests to stay on campus and made decisions prioritizing international students and students with the highest financial need. Those who were denied were given an appeals process. Under 500 students remain on campus.

"While we could not approve every student to remain on campus, we remain committed to supporting students, both in their search for off-campus housing and their broader needs," the spokesperson said via email. "If students are having difficulty while away from campus, either with housing or another issue, they continue to have resources and staff available to help address those difficulties -- they are

not alone." Counseling and student life resources are still available to students who have left campus.

Macknick, who is from Wisconsin, is one of the few students who have been able to remain on a campus. Princeton previously granted her status as an independent student.

She complained that university guidance was haphazardly rolled out and sometimes reversed. For example, the university flip-flopped its decision to allow thesis research as an approved reason to stay without properly communicating to students, she said. Individual students shared personal emails from staff in group chats to spread the word.

"There's been a lot of issues with inconsistencies," Macknick said.

Princeton has said the reversal was due to fast-changing state restrictions that closed libraries and research labs. Other institutions similarly found it difficult to stick to one message, with travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders changing daily. Some institutions gave students clear timelines to leave campus and then accelerated those timelines.

Life on Campus

The degree to which institutions are enforcing social distancing has

Students Remaining on Campus See 'A Ghost Town' (cont.)

been variable. Many institutions have banned students visiting one another in their dorms. At Chapman University, Sundby said that the administration moved each student staying on campus into their own apartment. Some students had to be moved because they were in buildings that were actually too empty -- a building with only a few students becomes a risk for fire, a target for theft, and can mean more work for a hamstrung facilities staff.

But the administration, Sundby said, is not policing social distancing by checking in on students or threatening penalties.

"We're going to provide you with information and set expectations, but we're going to trust that you're doing that without as much active enforcement."

At Princeton, Macknick said she has no access to common rooms or kitchens and is in a dorm room. The university has told students that they stand to lose their housing if they are caught breaking social distancing guidelines.

"Even if I'm walking by a friend in the dining hall and I want to stop and talk with them, I still have this fear in my head of, 'What if we're not completely six feet apart? What

if university public safety sees us? What if we get in trouble?'" she said. "Obviously you want to be taking these things seriously, but having the punishment be eviction when the students who are on campus now are in vulnerable situations with housing generally to start, it's just not the right move."

Princeton has said that it is taking social distancing and public health seriously. "In accepting the offer to remain, students agreed to social distancing and were told that their ability to remain was contingent on compliance with this expectation," a university spokesperson said via email. "Living in a dormitory presents particular challenges for keeping people healthy because of the close proximity and shared spaces. We are serious about the consequences of disregard of these conditions."

Alejandra Gonzalez, a freshman at Cornell University, said the administration there has taken a more relaxed approach. While there are rules, they are not being policed in the same way as at Princeton. Gonzalez said she thought Cornell was doing a great job.

"In every single way, I think they were as accommodating as possible, and they really, really worked

hard to make sure that students had everything they needed," she said.

Far from what some administrators and faculty feared when letting students stay, Gonzalez says the campus is definitely not a party atmosphere.

"Not having the student body, it feels kind of like a ghost town. Everything is empty, everything's quiet."

Jon Marlon Mirador, a junior at Virginia Commonwealth University, expressed a similar sentiment.

"The city is now dead," he said. Only one of his friends has stayed on campus, and they can see each other occasionally.

Though they've been allowed to stay and say they feel safe, students aren't completely out of the woods yet. Some are grappling with the next uncertainty: summer.

"What happens when the semester ends?" Macknick said. "No one knows if there's going to be summer housing or not."

Her plan if she can't stay is to find a room outside the university, though it will need to be accessible for her disability.

In a response, Princeton said a summer shelter review process will be in place "soon." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/20/students-campus-talk-about-experiences>

How Will Pass/Fail Affect Students' Future?

Many institutions are going pass/fail or making new grading schemes. How will prospective grad students, med students and community college transfers be affected?

By **Lilah Burke** // April 13, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/HH5800

Many colleges and universities, after looking at the havoc the coronavirus pandemic has wreaked on student lives, have decided to offer a more forgiving grade structure. Binary grading schemes like pass/fail or satisfactory/unsatisfactory have been put in place at many institutions, sometimes after much back-and-forth. Some have made the change mandatory for all students, while others have simply expanded an existing option.

The idea behind a binary scheme during the pandemic is that it can lessen students' anxiety. It can shield those who have been enormously burdened from a fatal hit to their grade point average. Moving

home, taking online classes, losing jobs or dealing with family health care can all have a profound effect on student performance.

But when a student is hoping to move on to graduate school, medical school or a four-year college, questions still abound about how a grade of "pass" is going to look to an admissions officer, or if community college courses will still transfer.

The answers aren't neat. Many institutions are altering their admissions criteria or practices. Some are trying to align with their peers. Others are going it alone.

Medical Schools

A few medical schools, which often have prerequisites for appli-

cation, have given students some tricky choices. At the medical colleges of Harvard and Georgetown Universities, for example, admissions offices announced a new policy. When looking at spring 2020 grades, those colleges will now accept a "pass" for a prerequisite. But Georgetown has said that letter grades are highly encouraged if available. Harvard had similar language on its admissions site but has recently removed it. (For undergrads, Harvard has switched to mandatory binary grades, while Georgetown has moved to an optional three-tier system.)

Premed students at Duke University, which is defaulting to a

How Will Pass/Fail Affect Students' Future? (cont.)

binary scheme but giving the option of a letter grade, might have a tough choice to make then if they are applying to Georgetown. Taking things easy, taking a pass and using extra time to care for family or work, for example, might no longer be an safe option.

The medical school at Johns Hopkins University says it is still debating whether to accept online classes as prerequisites, as it traditionally has declined to. Prospective Hopkins students who were completing prerequisites this spring might be out of luck, or they might have to take them again.

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers released guidance for institutions on how to implement and mark new grading schemes on transcripts, but the association recommends keeping things limited. Binary grades should only be used if instruction is terminated before learning goals are met. If instruction just moves online, AACRAO advises no transcript notations or changes in grading.

But the guidance also raises more questions. How to deal with athlete eligibility, scholarships or academic probation? Not all those questions have been answered.

Community College Transfers

For community college students hoping to transfer, the situation depends on the state.

The Virginia Community College System has also decided to switch to binary grades this semester, although students can still request a letter grade.

"There are equity concerns," said Joe DeFilippo, academic affairs director of the State Commission for Higher Education for Virginia. "We want to make sure that students experiencing this don't get penalized when they try to transfer to four-

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There are a lot of judgment calls being made and decisions being made to help the system move along as efficiently as possible.

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year institutions.”

DeFilippo said that before this spring, only five out of the 14 public colleges in Virginia were willing to accept a pass equivalent for transfer credit. A community college student looking to transfer might have had to retake those courses.

Now, with SCHEV's encouragement, nearly all 14 have said that they will transfer credit for a pass, in any courses taken in spring 2020, so long as the grade equates to more than a C. (The one holdout, the University of Virginia, is still in discussions, DeFilippo said).

"I think the decisions we've been talking about have been good ones. Is it a guarantee that they're going to turn out to be the perfect ones? No," he said. "No one really knows all the right things to be doing in every aspect of dealing with this current situation. There are a lot of judgment calls being made and decisions being made to help the system move along as efficiently as possible."

In other states, the process is a bit less clear. The California Community Colleges, for example, is waiving the deadline for students to choose pass/fail grades. But the California State University system has said it will give out transfer credit for a

pass grade only for general education requirements and major prerequisites. Others may require a letter grade for transfer credit. The University of California system chose instead to suspend its cap on pass/fail grades for transfer students.

Belle Wheelan, president of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, said that her understanding is that most four-year colleges are accepting pass/fail grades for the spring since every institution is affected. "We asked our institutions to be accepting but to make sure they have policies that explain their plan to do so," she said via email.

Graduate Schools

Only a few graduate schools have put out statements regarding admissions changes for the spring semester. UC Berkeley has said that it will make admissions decisions holistically, taking many pieces of an application into account.

"Such a review will take into account the significant disruptions of COVID-19 when reviewing students' transcripts and other admissions materials from Spring 2020," the announcement said. "We understand that many institutions across the country instituted P/NP grading

How Will Pass/Fail Affect Students' Future? (cont.)

policies during that semester. Thus, we will not penalize students for the adoption of P/NP and other grading options during this unprecedented period, whether the choices were made by institutions or by individual students."

Cornell University and the University of Rochester have both announced that they would be taking newly implemented grading structures into account when making decisions.

"As admissions bodies review applications in future admissions cycles, we will respect decisions made by individual students and/or by their academic institutions with regard to the enrollment in or adoption of Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, Pass/No Record, Credit/No Credit, Pass/Fail and other similar grading options during the pandemic disruptions," Cornell announced.

Both universities advised applicants to describe any special circumstances in their personal statements.

But Suzanne Ortega, president of the Council of Graduate Schools, believes that many grad schools are changing their practices but have not announced yet.

"The vast majority of universities are moving in the direction of

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Students are anxious. They're concerned. They have a goal of going to graduate and professional school and in addition to all the other disruptions, they worry about how grades will be interpreted.

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something we call 'holistic admissions consideration,'" she said. "Not as many universities have issued formal statements yet, but I think it's absolutely clear in the direction that universities and programs are going."

Holistic admissions review is based around the idea that no single piece of evidence by itself can say if a student is motivated or academically prepared.

"Consider a transcript in its total, be explicit about the kinds of characteristics you're looking for in applicants," Ortega said, explaining the philosophy. "Let their references know what kind of information

would be helpful, and then take all those things together to make a decision."

The council has encouraged grad schools to use holistic admissions practices for a few years now, but the pandemic has brought on new motivations and new urgency.

"Students are anxious. They're concerned. They have a goal of going to graduate and professional school and in addition to all the other disruptions, they worry about how grades will be interpreted," Ortega said. "The process is already in place, it has been in place, to recognize the unique and extraordinary times we're in." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/13/how-will-passfail-affect-students-future>

TEACHING AND FACULTY

Key Takeaways:

- Disruptions like “Zoombombing,” in which uninvited attendees disrupt virtual classes, caused significant problems for some faculty members after the switch to remote learning.
- The disruptions can be serious and sinister, with explicit images, pornography or racial slurs being shared.
- Instructors can take steps like locking meetings and adding passwords to help prevent disruptions, but training and vigilance is necessary.
- Colleges aren’t alone in dealing with disruptions like Zoombombing -- everything from AA meetings to prayer groups has been targeted.
- Faculty members have already died from COVID-19 infections, and institutions should consider plans for large-scale outbreaks.
- Faculty members teaching hands-on skills face the most challenges in a remote-learning environment.
- Questions linger about how many learning innovations tried during this period of disruption will continue into the future.

'Zoombies' Take Over Online Classrooms

Digital disruptors sharing racist, sexist and pornographic content in Zoom videoconferences show no sign of slowing down as "Zoombombing" trend grows.

By **Lindsay McKenzie** // April 3, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/SESTOVIC

A brief exchange is all it took for one student to completely derail an online accounting test at the University of Arizona yesterday.

"Don't make it too obvious at the start that you are trolling, just ease into it lmao."

"I got you, me and two other friends are joining."

Armed with a Zoom videoconference ID, the trolls got to work. Their efforts to disrupt the test resulted in its cancellation. Students have been asked to complete the test in their own time, the university confirmed.

This incident is just one of many disruptions to plague higher education in recent weeks as quarantined keyboard warriors seek to wreak havoc on classes that are suddenly being offered remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Such trolling, which first drew widespread attention last week, has been dubbed Zoombombing. Some of the disruption to online classrooms is random. Trolls playing "Zoom roulette" simply type a random 10-digit number into Zoom -- the videoconferencing service that many colleges and universities have relied on to move classes to remote instruction on short notice. Then the trolls see where they land.

More often than not, it seems the attacks on higher education classes are targeted. Many students are willingly sharing details of upcoming conference calls in online chat rooms and message boards. Those details often include passwords to private meetings scheduled by users with access to paid Zoom educational accounts.

On social media platforms, users

with hundreds of thousands of followers have openly called on students to share details of upcoming classes so that they may disrupt them. And there appears to be no shortage of volunteers.

In "best of" compilation videos on YouTube and in live Zoombombing incidents witnessed by *Inside Higher Ed*, intruders frequently pose as students before taking over classes.

Some of the disruptors launch into ridiculous lines of questioning, perform supposedly comedic skits or shout or breathe heavily into their microphones. Another popular tactic is to blast loud noises and music, a method known as "ear rape."

Often the intrusions take a far more sinister turn, with trolls sharing explicit images, streaming pornography, drawing crude images over instructors' slides, exposing

'Zoombies' Take Over Online Classrooms (cont.)

themselves or repeatedly expressing racial slurs -- sometimes aimed at specific instructors or students.

This harassment of minority instructors and students is reminiscent of the Gamergate movement, which describes the sustained misogynistic campaigns waged against women in the gaming community.

Zoombombing attacks, or Zoom raids, are planned on services such as Discord, a communication platform popular among gamers. In a Discord group accessed by *Inside Higher Ed*, online trolls seemed to delight in the confusion and distress they caused instructors, some of whom, they gleefully reported, had burst into tears. Some members of the group described themselves as wishing to pursue "good old-fashioned trolling" and said they drew the line at "really fucked-up shit" such as sharing child pornography or repeating the N-word over and over. "That's boring," one user wrote.

A single intruder can be quickly kicked out by meeting hosts, if they know how to do it. But coordinated attacks by dozens of trolls make it nearly impossible for instructors to take back control. Many Zoom-bombed classes descend into chaos, forcing instructors to simply shut them down.

Dozens of resources advising instructors on how to secure their videoconference calls have been published in the past week as awareness of Zoombombing grows, including this one from the company itself. The University of California, Berkeley's information security office shared this detailed prevention guide. On Twitter, instructors also shared tips and tricks to prevent intrusions.

There are several simple steps that instructors can take to mini-

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It's important for faculty to understand that they are not alone in dealing with this.

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mize intrusions, including locking meetings so that no new attendees can join once classes have started and muting all attendees. Adding a password for meetings is a simple deterrent, provided students don't share the passwords. At the University of Arizona, a spokeswoman said the institution is now advising all instructors to screen call participants in virtual waiting rooms before they start their classes.

As quickly as instructors adapt to best practices however, trolls are finding workarounds. On a recent Reddit thread, one user shared that changing your username to "iPhone" or "Samsung" may fool instructors screening participants into thinking that you are a student calling into the meeting from your cellphone, rather than accessing the call through your computer.

The escalating problem of Zoombombing isn't exclusive to education. AA meetings, prayer groups and book readings for children have been recently commandeered by Zoombombers. A small number of people have started referring to these trolls as "Zoombies" -- a fitting term for the apocalyptic atmosphere of a nation gripped by a global pandemic.

"It's important for faculty to understand that they are not alone in dealing with this," said Liz Gross, founder and CEO of Campus Sonar, a company that develops social media strategies for higher education institutions.

Campus Sonar has been tracking public online conversations about higher education and the impact of the coronavirus online since March. The term "Zoombombing" didn't show up in the company's data set until March 21, Gross said.

"It had minimal mentions until March 31 and April 1, when we detected a threefold increase in Zoombombing mentions."

Gross predicts that the trend will "likely get worse before it gets better" as online groups start to copy each other's Zoombombing antics.

While some students have complained about the disruption caused by Zoombombing on Twitter and other online forums, others seem to find the practice amusing, Gross said. Some trolls may be engaging in Zoombombing just for the sake of causing disruption, but others may see it as an opportunity to promote certain political agendas, including spreading extreme

'Zoombies' Take Over Online Classrooms (cont.)

right-wing views through a practice known as "dropping redpills."

"I found one concerning message on 4chan from March 31 in a thread about politics suggesting that since millions of students across America are in online classes on Zoom, 4chan users could get into those classrooms and 'drop redpills,'" said Gross. "They went on further to quip that they could 'redpill entire schools' if only a few committed to it."

The link between Zoombombing and criminal activity was highlighted this week by an advisory from the FBI encouraging people who are the victims of videoconference hijacking to report it as a cyber-crime.

Increased use of videoconferencing tools by higher education institutions, the private sector and government agencies in the wake of the coronavirus could be exploited by cybercriminals to steal sensitive information and target individuals, the FBI also warned.

The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center, or IC3, reported that as of March 30, it has received and

reviewed more than 1,200 complaints related to COVID-19 scams. These include phishing campaigns targeting first responders, distributed denial of service attacks against government agencies and ransomware attacks at medical facilities.

These same groups "will target businesses and individuals working from home via telework software vulnerabilities, education technology platforms and new business email compromise schemes," the FBI predicted.

The rise of Zoombombing provides an opportunity for institutions to talk about the importance of data security and privacy online, said Brian Kelly, director of the cybersecurity program at higher education IT membership group Educause.

Despite many negative news articles criticizing weaknesses in the Zoom videoconferencing platform this week, Kelly says the product is not "inherently less secure" than other videoconferencing tools. It is simply under increased scrutiny since so many people are now using it.

"Zoom has been very responsive

to the criticism," said Kelly. "They aren't circling the wagons."

He noted that earlier this week, Zoom changed the default settings for users with educational Zoom licenses so that only hosts can share content, and the company is continuously making updates. "There is some risk with all of these platforms. The trick is learning to mitigate that risk," he said.

Zoom's CEO, Eric Yuan, wrote in a blog post Wednesday that the company would be focusing exclusively on bolstering its security and privacy over the next 90 days.

"We appreciate the scrutiny and questions we have been getting -- about how the service works, about our infrastructure and capacity, and about our privacy and security policies. These are questions that will make Zoom better, both as a company and for all its users," wrote Yuan.

"We recognize that we have fallen short of the community's -- and our own -- privacy and security expectations. For that, I am deeply sorry and I want to share what we are doing about it." ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/03/zoombombing-isn%E2%80%99t-going-away-and-it-could-get-worse>

When Professors Get Sick

Some administrators and instructors are making plans for unprecedented illness and even death among faculty members.

By **Lilah Burke** // April 6, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MIHALEC

"The absenteeism of professors is not a new issue," said Chuck Staben, former president of the University of Idaho and current professor there. "What is a new issue is the scale of what we're potentially facing."

In the face of rising coronavirus cases, the scale of professor absenteeism could be much larger than anything colleges have seen in recent decades.

The devil's arithmetic isn't hard to follow. Some models have predicted over 40 percent of the American public will get COVID-19. Nineteen percent of cases need to be hospitalized, and 6 percent need intensive care. The White House predicts now 100,000 to 240,000 deaths, at best, from the new coronavirus. At least four prominent faculty members already have passed away.

Some academic leaders have

begun to ask how to prepare for what seems increasingly inevitable. What happens if professors, on a never-before-seen scale, get too sick to teach? What happens if they die?

Last week Feng Sheng Hu, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, sent a memo to faculty members in his college.

"In the coming weeks, it is likely that more cases will emerge in our campus community and our college," Hu said. "For [students'] benefit, it is important that we do everything we can to maintain course continuity now that instruction has moved online for the rest of the semester. With that in mind, we ask you to make contingency plans for how your classes will continue, should you become unavailable to

teach for any reason."

Hu suggested arranging for a colleague to step in or planning alternative activities.

After English professor Curtis Perry tweeted about getting the memo, other faculty from institutions in the U.S., Canada and New Zealand chimed in that they had received similar letters, or had sent them out to their teams.

Perry and many others bristled at the requests, both at their euphemistic language along with the idea that professors facing death should be responsible for keeping business running.

"You get an A! And you get an A!" someone joked in the replies.

"I'm dead," another said. "My contract has for sure ended."

Perry clarified that regardless of the tone of the request, he objected

When Professors Get Sick (cont.)

to the idea that he could even complete it.

"It is of course reasonable to be concerned about the illness or death of faculty -- I'm just not sure it makes sense to ask faculty themselves to take the lead in setting up contingencies without providing guidelines concerning budgetary support," he said via email. "Am I supposed to ask a grad student to add my class to their portfolio without compensation?"

Even disregarding budgetary concerns, it may be impossible to find instructors who can step in for niche or upper-level courses.

The University of Illinois emphasized that considering the impact of illness is a normal part of business.

"Contingencies for replacement instruction are a standard consideration in our academic operations during a normal semester where face-to-face instruction accounts for the majority of our course delivery," said a university spokesperson via email. "But we realize that some of our standard practices for replacement instruction may not translate when faculty and students are not physically in the same place."

Hu said he was simply asking everyone to do their best in difficult circumstances. "There are various reasons that an instructor may not be able to teach, including an illness and family obligations," he said via email. "We are not telling

instructors what specific contingency plans they should make. We want them to do whatever they feel is best for their students and their courses."

Staben, who now teaches biology, cited a few potential options for how to proceed when a professor can't teach, though none are ideal.

There's the substitute model, the class could be frozen or suspended, or students could be given an "instructor incomplete" similar to the incomplete grade they would receive if students were unable to finish a course.

But freezing a course or giving an instructor incomplete may run afoul of current financial aid rules, Staben said. A substitute model could put an incredible burden on a few people in a small department. One other option would be to move a class to asynchronous instruction, but few professors have those resources lined up.

Staben said most institutions are unprepared for a potential crisis, pointing out that while the best continuity of operations plan he's seen, from the University of Washington, asks planners to prepare for staff absenteeism of 25 percent, the college's public academic continuity plan doesn't make the same consideration for faculty.

"If the University of Washington has 10 plumbers and they need to make sure that the plumbing system stays in operation, then the eight plumbers who are left can do

that," he said. "But not necessarily in the nuclear physics department."

John Lombardi, former leader at several universities and the author of *How Universities Work*, said that whether this planning is really necessary still remains to be seen.

"Probably useful to think about this, but probably not useful to construct complicated alternative contingencies covering every imaginable sequence of illness, whether related to the virus or not," he said via email. "Unless we imagine a massive collapse of the university workforce, it's likely best to try and deal with these issues within the context of normal sick leave, normal reallocation of work and similar adjustments."

Higher ed would do well, he said, to spend its time on the problems it's already facing.

Staben said he personally is unprepared for his class to go on without him. Regardless, he feels this is an issue faculty need to grapple with.

"We're responsible for the quality of educational outcomes. We're responsible for the curriculum. We should want to be engaged in ensuring successful completion of that curriculum," he said. "It's not about grades so much as what those students were supposed to learn."

One thing is for certain. At some institutions, the plans are being laid. One can only hope they'll never be needed. ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/06/colleges-plan-unprecedented-wave-illness-among-faculty-members>

Adjusting to Remote Instruction at Community Colleges

Faculty members at community and technical colleges face challenges in the pivot to remote learning and are trying new technology, assessment tools and ways to communicate.

By **Madeline St. Amour** // April 9, 2020

As the novel coronavirus spread, colleges around the country were forced to quickly close campuses and move learning online to help flatten the curve.

But not all at once. Colleges with fewer resources (and smaller endowments) stayed open for weeks after many highly selective institutions made the switch. Some cited concerns for their students, many of whom rely on campus services like food pantries and computer labs to be successful.

By now, though, instruction nearly everywhere has gone virtual. *Inside Higher Ed* asked faculty members at community and technical colleges how the shift to remote learning is going at institutions that often have less federal and state funding support while serving some of higher education's most vulnerable students.

Some were optimistic they would get through this with their students, despite difficulty learning how to adapt to online instruction. Others are using a plethora of virtual tools to keep students connected and learning. Those who teach hands-on skills face the most challenges, from finicky technology to concerns for how to grade students' understanding of the lessons. Their emailed responses, which have been edited for length and clarity, are below.

David Shapiro, founding faculty member of philosophy at Cascadia College in Washington

I have been a classroom teacher of philosophy for more than a quar-



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/DAMIRCUDIC

ter century, and I am, if I do say so myself, pretty good at it.

I know how to engage students in the questions, I'm skilled in techniques for fostering dialogue and discussion, and I have countless exercises in my bag of teaching tricks for creating a vibrant community of inquiry in the classroom.

I have developed my abilities over the course of my teaching career thanks to some excellent classroom teachers of my own, lots of hard work, hours of professional development and decades of trial and error. It's taken a long time to get to this point, and every day in the classroom I learn something

new that can help me be better tomorrow.

Now, however, I've been thrown into the world of online teaching and have had all of one week of "extended spring break" to convert my spring quarter classes to the virtual environment. I'm committed to doing the best job I can, but it's ludicrous to imagine that the learning experience for my students will be anywhere near as rich as what they would get in the "face-to-face modality."

My heart goes out to them; they had been expecting their professor to be an experienced educator; what they're getting is something

Adjusting to Remote Instruction at Community Colleges (cont.)

more like the graduate student I was the very first time I TAed -- that inexperienced person in front of the classroom with the deer-in-the-headlights look in their eyes.

We'll make the best of it, I'm sure, but I feel bad about how bad I will be at teaching online. I suppose the positive takeaway is that I'll learn from the experience. A quarter century from now, I might be pretty good at it.

Christian Moriarty, professor of ethics and law and academic chair of the Applied Ethics Institute at St. Petersburg College in Florida

Our move to remote learning was, fortunately, a relatively smooth one. Just under half of St. Petersburg College (a state community college in southwest Florida with an enrollment of about 45,000 students) was already [using] online modalities, with all of the infrastructure and staff to support it. There was significant behind-the-scenes scrambling in the short period of time after spring break, both from the administrative and academic sides of the house, but we have a great team who got everything together. Particularly our Online Learning Services folks, who have been nothing short of miracle workers.

We have synchronous meeting and proctoring software up and running to be available to anyone to wants it, students and faculty alike. There are pockets of issues here and there, such as science lab classes and clinicals, but we're getting them handled to where both our accreditors and our students are as happy as they can be under the circumstances.

A challenge we're facing head-on is our students who are suddenly finding themselves in a full-remote atmosphere when they did not originally plan for it. After we conducted a survey, a significant contin-

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gent reported that they are feeling economic impairments due to the responses to COVID. Not only may they be out of work, but they may also be taking care of family and children at home, making them unable to concentrate as fully as they would otherwise like to on school.

We've addressed this challenge in three major ways: bringing to bear the full attention and care of our faculty to our students and establishing a sense of normality in addition to academics, collating and distributing information and assistance on learning effectively and shifting to an online environment, and the St. Petersburg College Foundation putting the Student Emergency Fund into high gear. While we have always had the fund, focusing on helping students through tough economic situations, I'm incredibly proud of the community who have stepped up their giving to these scholars in their time of need. We're happy to help them with what we can, such as bills, food and whatever else that can establish stability and finish the semester strong.

Jeff Elsbecker, lead instructor in the digital modeling and fabrication program at IYRS School

of Technology & Trades in Rhode Island

Because most of my program's faculty are adjunct, we already conducted most of the communication outside of class by way of email and a digital classroom. In addition, a major part of the curriculum is CAD, which is done on computer and can be shared digitally. Finally, the bulk of our hands-on instruction had been completed. Some of the groundwork was already there, so the transition to online was not cold turkey. We've had to redefine final projects to a largely digital outcome.

Some challenges include students' loss of a daily routine, which created a noticeable drop in productivity, and students' loss of access to the studio equipment, as this is still a program about making things.

To help overcome some of these, we've been holding regular individual check-ins with students and morning video meetings. We've also been extending deadlines somewhat.

Each student has a 3-D printer they took home with them. They are able to do a good deal of prototyping at home. Some faculty are still on duty in the studio. Students are able to send proven digital files,

Adjusting to Remote Instruction at Community Colleges (cont.)

which we can put on our more advanced machines. They can pick these up curbside.

Nels Larson, lead instructor of marine systems at IYRS School of Technology & Trades in Rhode Island

Remote learning was new to me and personally not the way I would like to learn on a full-time basis. I always found tutorials helpful in a subject that I was familiar with. For those reasons I chose to do our presentations live. To achieve this we presented our lectures live in the classroom with no changes or preparation for one to two hours a day. This did keep the attention of the students and was well received for one and a half weeks. The problem we started to have was getting the hands-on presentations and the hands-on experiential learning needed to continue the class. It will take a substantial investment to prepare and deliver that type of material.

We prepared a pre-record[ed] demonstration and presented it to the students. The lesson was using a volt meter and ampacity of wire. We physically burn a wire. This demonstration is dangerous and necessary to understand the lecture. We recorded, and it took three different takes before we were ready to present. The presentation was good but did have some inaccuracies. This would be acceptable in the shop. At that point we determined all record[ed] demonstrations need to be of a high standard. We also felt the students who needed to ask questions did not ask them. I believe that remote learning will not work with students who have no experience in the topic being taught. The amount of material needed to learn in a six-month period cannot be delivered remotely.

Technical trades can only be

taught remotely in tutorials to students who have a technical [background] and in small doses.

AnneMarie Garmon, instructor of criminal justice at Central Piedmont Community College in North Carolina

My approach to remote teaching was to focus on maintaining a high level of learning and connection while also minimizing stress for my students. I knew that all of the unknowns of our current situation were causing a lot of anxiety for me personally, and when I thought about what my students might be feeling, I realized that their mental health was also very important to our collective success. I have made communication the No. 1 focus, because if we can talk with each other, about not just academic topics but also life challenges, we can begin to feel as if we have a little more control of the “new normal.”

Some items that I’ve implemented to help keep communication open include Google Hangouts, WebEx teams/meetings and Calendly (which students can use to schedule one-on-one virtual meetings). I also have given my students a phone number they can text through Google Voice. Because we have so many ways to reach out, I wanted to capitalize on as many options as I could to appeal to the students’ preferences as well. The last thing I’m considering adding is a platform on social media, like Facebook, for a more informal way to socialize.

One of the most effective tools that I have used in teaching, which fosters great communication for both academic topics and current events, is Packback. A platform for online discussion, Packback allows the students to discuss topics and issues that are subject-related while also not overburdening me as the instructor. The use of AI in the

platform also gives students feedback to help them create thoughtful questions and responses, and not just the typical “I agree” that we see in discussion boards. I added this tool to my classes that went from seated to online, and thus far it has been easy for the students to use.

Now that we have settled into the online environment with our traditional students, I hope to keep adding tools to help us continue social interactions virtually. I am also going to organize some optional activities for the students, like using Zoom to have a coffee meeting or using Kast to host a watch party online. I believe that learning can take place in these settings just as easily as the classroom -- we just have to adjust and accept change.

Hans Scholl, instructor of boat building and restoration at IYRS School of Technology & Trades in Rhode Island

The predominant part of our curriculum is hands-on shop work, restoring wooden boats, and is not transferable to nor replaceable by remote learning.

For the part that teaches theory, we spent one week preparing for remote teaching. Half of that week was implementation, training and testing of technical options, mostly using Zoom. The other half was preparing content and preparing the students in one-to-one phone calls for the upcoming remote teaching.

We are currently holding two classes every morning, with the afternoons spent on documentation, one-to-one phone interaction with students, where needed, and mostly with preparing content for next days’ classes.

Because we can directly demonstrate practical skills in the shop during regular class, we had little incentive in the past to create videos of these demonstrations. On

Adjusting to Remote Instruction at Community Colleges (cont.)

the other hand, these videos would be good to have in the current situation.

We have started to film in the shop but have not had the time nor resources to get very far. The session we filmed was done by one instructor in the shop, taking video with his phone, which was then part of the Zoom recording. Though the result was commendable to be used in the current situation, any results obtained in this fashion remain inferior to a dedicated video, filmed by a second person with professional video-photography and editing skills, good lighting and a dedicated camera, where the instructor is free to fully focus on

content and not also taking video.

We have encountered mostly technical problems, such as the low bandwidth of Zoom, which makes it not feasible to stream video and results in choppy audio and pixelated video in general. At times, not even screen sharing of text was possible, leading to early termination and re-scheduling of one class.

Platforms other than Zoom had similar issues. The best option for small student groups and coordination between instructors has been Apple's FaceTime.

During a typical school day, student understanding of the theory taught is mostly verified during the subsequent hands-on work on re-

storing boats, where subjects that were not clearly understood by the student become visible during their application and can then be retrained and practiced.

This approach is not feasible during remote learning. We reverted to more discussion to obtain student feedback, which was often compromised by the technical problems and low audio quality. Some students have no video capability, which makes us miss visible cues that we would get face-to-face. We plan on testing understanding through quizzes but haven't had any time to prepare, administer, correct and follow up with students yet. ■

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<https://insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/09/community-college-faculty-members-adjust-remote-learning>

Synchronous Instruction Is Hot Right Now, but Is It Sustainable?

Synchronous instruction is trending, but experts say a more intentional mix of live and asynchronous classwork is necessary for future remote terms.

By **Colleen Flaherty** // April 29, 2020



SOURCE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/LEOPATRIZI

There were lots of reasons for professors to avoid synchronous instruction at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Students are scattered across different time zones, their access to computers and reliable internet varies, and everyday schedules have changed. It's also hard to teach a 10 a.m. class live when you keep getting booted off your own videoconference, for example, or when students don't show up because they're caring for their families or have other responsibilities at that time.

Yet synchronous, real-time instruction, typically via videoconferencing, has surged in the past two months. Zoom and other synchronous platforms are popular ways to hold class.

Experts say this isn't necessarily a bad thing in an emergency sit-

uation. Among other benefits, synchronous instruction can provide socially isolated students a schedule and sense of community. But it disadvantages some students, including those with disabilities, and it can also overwhelm professors. Asynchronous instruction, meanwhile -- in which students learn via videos, readings and other media -- is typically self-paced. Transcripts and other learning aids can be made available to some or all students.

So those same experts warn professors who went all synchronous this semester as a survival strategy that future terms will be different. Students will demand a mix of instructional methods if campuses remain closed for summer and fall terms and classes are remote.

"I don't see it as synchronous versus asynchronous, it's 'What's the

right approach for your students or your subject matter?'" said Phil Hill, a partner at MindWires, an ed-tech consultancy. "What I do see is that videoconferencing is overused right now and faculty and schools better rebalance before the fall. They better understand the limitations and back way off of synchronous video and increase the usage of asynchronous tools, because we haven't seen enough of that."

Limitations of Synchronous Instruction

The limitations of synchronous video are equity and access, Hill said. Do students have a quiet space and computers with strong internet connections to thrive during live class meetings? A recent study by WhistleOut, for example, found that one-third of adult respondents who transitioned to

Synchronous Instruction Is Hot Right Now, but Is It Sustainable? (cont.)

working or studying from home had been prevented from doing so by weak internet. Two-thirds said their video calls had cut out, frozen or disconnected. Additional concerns include security, such as Zoombombing, when trolls crash live classes with offensive content.

Synchronous instruction also doesn't always offer students with special learning needs or disabilities what they need to learn. Some professors who lecture live record their meetings and post them online afterward, with transcripts and other materials, but not all.

Penny E. MacCormack, chief academic officer at the Association of College and University Educators, which offers a popular course on effective teaching practices and other professional development, said that synchronous class meetings can be "great opportunities for students and instructors to interact and delve into some of the class materials more deeply." At the same time, she said, "we do need to recognize that being able to meet at a particular time and having the technology available to do so can be challenging for a variety of reasons."

One approach is using synchronous meetings "sparingly for learning opportunities that truly benefit from that special kind of interaction a Zoom meeting can supply," MacCormack said, "and make them voluntary so that students who, for any variety of reasons, cannot join don't feel left out."

Learning management systems, which are often used to facilitate asynchronous instruction, have seen major increases in usage since the spread of COVID-19 forced U.S. institutions to go remote. But LMS usage hasn't increased nearly as much as synchronous activity in virtual classrooms and videoconferencing. D2L

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to meet at a particular time
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Brightspace's Virtual Classroom is seeing 25 times more activity than usual, and Blackboard Collaborate's global daily user count increased by 3,600 percent, for example, according to an analysis by Hill.

Zoom usage went up 20-fold. The service doesn't release education-specific numbers, but there's been an obvious higher ed boom there and on similar platforms, such as Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams.

Hill's analysis says that the videoconference was the defining feature of Phase 1 of the transition to remote teaching and learning. Phase 2, which we're in now, puts a greater emphasis on equity and accessibility. Phase 3, starting in August, entails being able to support students remotely for a full term. Phase 4, in 2021, is a new normal.

Charles Hodges, a professor of leadership, technology and human development at Georgia Southern University, said that in the current "emergency," delivering lectures via synchronous videoconference "might be a first impulse, if that is what you were planning for your face-to-face classes."

Now, however, he said, instructors "should be asking themselves questions like, 'Is it important for the class to meet all together at the same time? Why? Is it reasonable to expect all of my students to be together online at once given what they might be juggling at home now?'"

Seeking a Balance

Maybe synchronous delivery is the "best option for your particular circumstance, but it should be a thoughtful decision considering several factors -- not simply that you think your students need to see your talking head," Hodges said.

Viviana Pezzullo, a graduate teaching assistant in comparative studies at Florida Atlantic University, is currently teaching both synchronously and asynchronously and has found asynchronous instruction to be most effective in ensuring student success. A lot of prep work is needed, though, she said: video lectures, announcements, assignments and guided group discussions. And because students don't literally see you, Pezzullo said it's important to establish a pattern of communication, with announcements posted

Synchronous Instruction Is Hot Right Now, but Is It Sustainable? (cont.)

on a weekly or biweekly basis and outreach to individual students.

Either way, Pezzullo advised posting accessible documents, such as transcripts of lectures, for all students – not just those who ask for them. Breakout rooms for small-group interaction benefit students in large, synchronous classes, she also advised.

Lauri Mattenson, an instructor of writing and affiliate faculty members in disability studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, said she's found herself "far more in tune with the diverse needs and preferences of all my students" this term. She's teaching synchronously and using her course website for discussions and the video gallery. In addition to meeting with her classes as a group, Mattenson also meets with students individually and in small groups on Zoom.

Learning From the Crisis

Describing the pandemic as something of an opportunity in this narrow sense, Mattenson said, "There's a shift happening." Previously, she said via email, "there was a standard format/structure/set of expectations for each class, and 'accommodations' were viewed as being designed for a small subset of people with needs."

Now, there's a "broader understanding that we are all people with needs and true inclusivity can acknowledge those varying needs without dividing us into categories like normal/abnormal, standard/atypical, etc. The disabled should not be viewed as a singular or 'deficient' group."

Annie Soisson, director of the Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at Tufts University, said remote teaching during this crisis means "moving more quickly in a direction than we would have otherwise." Tufts, like

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most institutions, hasn't made a decision about whether courses will be in person or not in the fall. Whatever happens, Soisson is encouraging professors to start putting parts of their courses on Canvas, Tufts's LMS, anyway, as "you have nothing to lose."

Doing so leaves room for more active learning during class time, which only benefits students, especially minoritized students, she said.

"A lot of things about online teaching make our face-to-face teaching better."

Socially and emotionally, Soisson said, "The synchronous part has been really important for many of those students and help them avoid feelings of isolation and the loss they felt being ripped from the academic environment and their friends and supports."

There's a careful balance to be struck between synchronous and asynchronous instruction in the fall, however, if necessary. Initial feedback shows Tufts that students do not like lectures on Zoom, while they do like small-group instruction and the use of breakout rooms on the platform.

As for asynchronous instruction,

Soisson said that students need high executive functioning skills to set schedules for themselves to work when they're used to a much more regular rhythm: class at a certain time two or three times a week.

Barbara Lockee, a professor of education and faculty fellow in the Office of the Provost at Virginia Tech, also said some learners need more structure than others, and that undergraduate learners, in particular, may be "more accustomed to the usual routines and instructional traditions associated with classroom-based learning experiences."

Synchronous delivery with tools such as Zoom more closely approximates that environment, but flexibility is essential in the current context, Lockee said. So a "blended strategy" that incorporates both synchronous and asynchronous activities can serve to "keep learners on track, while providing some flexibility in the engagement with other content or assessments."

Several campuses have announced they're looking into boot camp-style online instructional training for faculty members over the summer. Hill was somewhat skeptical of that idea, saying that in-

Synchronous Instruction Is Hot Right Now, but Is It Sustainable? (cont.)

stitutions best positioned for this era had a "culture" of online teaching and learning in general prior to the pandemic.

Zoom Fatigue, and a False Binary?

Synchronous video instruction might be easier on its face for faculty members. But they're also inundated with additional videoconferencing demands, Lockee said: individual advising, research activities, administrative meetings, crisis response planning and more.

The Zoom boom has added to the faculty workload to the point of becoming an "impediment to instructional planning and the completion of class activities related to feedback and grading," she warned. "With all course activities being offered online, class time is now 24-7, and the demands on faculty are exhausting."

Many professor report Zoom fatigue. Susan Blum, a professor

of anthropology at the University of Notre Dame, explored just why videoconferencing feels so much more exhausting than classroom teaching in a widely read column for *Inside Higher Ed*.

"I'm on high alert, I'm vigilant the whole time," Blum said in an interview. "Every sense is recruited to try and make sure it's working well."

She rarely lectures in her ordinary classes but has done so on Zoom. That's not all she's doing synchronously, however. She's leading breakout discussions, having project teams read each other's writing and more.

Blum said she doesn't like to treat synchronous and asynchronous instruction as two wildly different ideas, anyway, arguing that professors have long taught in a "blended" manner.

Arguably, a blend of synchronous and asynchronous instruction is a kind of flipped classroom, in which

students front-load content outside class and reserve actual class time for the application of that content through active learning exercises.

"Learning is not just something that happens when a teacher is watching," Blum said.

Similarly, Hodges, of Georgia Southern, said that an asynchronous delivery format "can allow students to dig deeper into readings, questions and assignments before responding in a synchronous format."

More than attaching labels to how professors deliver content, Blum had different, perhaps bigger questions on her mind one recent afternoon.

"The key is to figure out, what are we really trying to accomplish? What do students need to accomplish, without just assuming that you have to stick to the syllabus and follow the textbook and the schedule and everything?" she asked. ■

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