

University of Minnesota Board of Regents
Mission Fulfillment Committee
June 11, 2020

**COVID-19 Pandemic: Framework for
Delivering Academic Mission in Fall 2020**

Introduction

In mid-April 2020, President Joan Gabel constructed a Fall 2020 Scenarios Advisory Team to plan for delivery of the academic mission in Fall 2020 in the context of COVID-19. The team brought together public health experts, academic leaders, and operational representatives from across the system (Appendix A).

Although the University of Minnesota has provided high-quality online instruction for more than 20 years, a core part of our discussion involved the value of place-based learning at our comprehensive land-grant research university, especially for traditional-age learners. For some courses and some learning objectives, physical presence is pivotal, enabling active engagement, interpersonal and intercultural learning, hands-on demonstrations, lab experiences, studio learning (music, art, dance, theatre, etc.), group problem-solving, community-based learning, field work, internships, clinical experiences, and more. Beyond the classroom, evidence suggests that undergraduate students who reside on campus and achieve higher levels of success, including first-year retention and graduation rates.

The residential college experience builds community and provides a sense of belonging, vital to development in young adulthood. Colleges and universities also serve as social safety nets for many diverse and vulnerable students who consider student housing their only home. In-person learning further addresses equity issues regarding access to technology, mental health support, access to space conducive to studying, and peer support. That said, as we have learned this Spring, for some courses or components of courses and some learning objectives, distance education has significant and often unexplored or unexpected potential.

Process

Our work was informed by public health data and guidance (CDC, MDH, ACHA and others) as well as environmental scans planning by peer institutions. Representatives from this team served on state-level workgroups for higher education in housing (UMD, UMR, UMTC), classrooms (UMR, UMTC), surge (UMC, UMD, UMTC), and social-behavioral (UMD). We solicited feedback from our campus communities as described above, and received responses via a survey link. We also received emails directly or indirectly, which were considered alongside the survey responses. (Input is summarized in Appendix B.) In addition, we consulted with University faculty, staff and student governance, academic and administrative leaders, and other committees and work groups.

We relied heavily on the principles approved by the University of Minnesota Board of Regents, as applied to this context (Appendix C).

The team focused on four key spheres of UMN academic life:

- classrooms/study spaces/libraries;
- labs/studios;

- housing/dining/recreation centers/student unions/events;
- outreach/engagement

We agreed to explore four alternative scenarios across these spheres. Each scenario is defined by a different set of assumptions in terms of the underlying state of the science and public health recommendations.

The report describes each scenario in some depth; more detail on each scenario can be found in a summary posted [online](#). For purposes of this discussion, however, we seek to describe conditions under which we propose to resume in-person, residential instruction in Fall, 2020, and ask the Board to approve these conditions so that we can quickly communicate with incoming and continuing students, staff and faculty/instructors, subject to final action in July.

Need for Flexibility

Our discussions and consultation have highlighted to us the need for flexibility in our planning.

First, we recognize that individuals may be differentially vulnerable during this time, either based on their or their family's health status, their identity, access to technology, disability status, or for other reasons. One hallmark of these scenarios, and the way we intend them to be implemented, is that of flexibility at the individual level. If an instructor, teaching assistant or staff member doesn't feel comfortable coming to campus, they should be offered the opportunity to teach or work at a distance. Students who are concerned about exposure, are unable to come to campus in person (or alternatively are unable to return home), or who are concerned about access, should have alternative modality options if public health guidance allows.

Second, each scenario incorporates contingencies and accommodations for individuals who themselves fall sick or whose status otherwise changes over the course of the year. This includes, at a minimum, testing when clinically indicated, contact tracing and isolation for those with the disease, and quarantine for those exposed, all while respecting privacy and HIPAA. This type of flexibility also includes identifying a succession plan for individual instructors and staff; i.e. identifying who might take over a course if an instructor falls ill, or academic advising if a staff member is unavailable. The Provost's Office has undertaken a review of policies related to student absence and bereavement on the Twin Cities campus (Appendix D), has developed a COVID-specific FAQ, and will recommend that instructors and students are reminded of those policies at the start of the semester. Similar reviews are recommended for other campuses. The Disabilities Resource Center serves students, staff and faculty across the system, and will be called upon to help with this review and to communicate regarding the accommodations process.

Third, each scenario takes into account the possibility that future health conditions may require rolling back to more restricted operations or a continuation of opening up. Incorporating flexibility for changing conditions is a key consideration of our planning. Our implementations will need to align with guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health, the Center for Disease Control, and other public health officials regarding gathering size, congregate living, congregate dining, in-person instruction, and childcare, and we recognize that these are currently and continually evolving.

Finally, we recognize differences between the system campuses that may require variations in design and implementation of these recommendations. We encourage, and indeed require, creativity and flexibility in designing and implementing systems at different locations. As local conditions change,

individual system campuses may need to adjust their mission delivery to reflect the advice of health professionals.

Recommendations

We recommend the resumption of in-person instruction and opening of residence halls, dining facilities and other campus services in a manner consistent with public health guidance. This will include adjusting capacity levels for classroom occupancy, residence halls and dining capacity, and other in-person experiences.

While faculty retain the autonomy to determine the modality of their teaching, and how to best achieve their learning objectives, classroom capacity constraints will limit how many classes may be offered in-person and when. Faculty will be strongly encouraged to develop courses that are multi-modal, to accommodate the flexibility described above, and will be provided support to aid in this development. Labs and other experiential learning components of classes may be “front-loaded” in order to ensure they can be completed in-person in case of an outbreak or an early pivot. We have developed, and are committed to offering, a fully-distanced first-year curriculum for international students who might not be able to arrive on campus in the Fall, or for other incoming students who prefer to advance their education in that manner.

Similarly, residence hall occupancy, dining hall hours and modality (self-service, plated service, take-out), recreation centers, and student affairs activities will be determined by public health guidance.

We further recommend that at all system campuses in-person undergraduate instruction stop by Thanksgiving break, or sooner if public health guidance dictates. This can be accomplished by academic calendar adjustments (beginning the semester earlier), a planned pivot to distanced education at Thanksgiving for the remainder of the term, or a combination of both.

Finally, we recommend a series of actions to increase public health and safety on campus. This includes at a minimum self-monitoring for symptoms, testing and isolation for those with the virus, and contact tracing and quarantine for those exposed. As more global testing becomes logistically, scientifically and financially feasible, this will be an additional option to incorporate, in conjunction with the Medical School and Genomics Center.

We are approaching this recommendation and discussion with humility. We recognize that the situation is fluid; public health guidance changes as outbreaks occur or recede, and medical advances in testing and even potentially in vaccination are continually advancing. Our medical and public health resources are exceptional. We anticipate that changes to these plans will be adjusting continually to ensure that the environment we provide to our students, staff and faculty is as safe as anywhere.

Appendix A: Fall 2020 Scenarios Advisory Team

Michael Berthelsen, Vice President for University Services
Lendley Black, Chancellor, University of Minnesota Duluth
Katharine Bonneson, Assistant Vice President, University Health and Safety
Phil Buhlmann, 3M/Alumni Professor, Distinguished University Teaching Professor, and Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Chemistry; Vice Chair of Faculty Consultative Committee
Lori J. Carrell, Chancellor, University of Minnesota Rochester
Rachel T.A. Croson, Executive Vice President and Provost, *Advisory Team Leader*
Connie Delaney, Dean, School of Nursing, and Chair, Twin Cities Deans Council
Fernando Delgado, Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of Minnesota Duluth
Lisa Erwin, Vice Chancellor for Student Life and Dean of Students, University of Minnesota Duluth
Michael Goh, Vice President for Equity & Diversity; Professor of Organizational Leadership, Policy, & Development
John Hoffman, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, University of Minnesota Crookston
Laurie McLaughlin, Interim Associate Vice President, Auxiliary Services
Amy Pittenger, Associate Professor and Head, Pharmaceutical Care & Health-Systems; Chair, Faculty Consultative Committee
Janet Schrunk Ericksen, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean; Associate Professor of English; University of Minnesota Morris
Maggie Towle, Interim Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students
Susan Van Voorhis, Associate Vice President, Academic Support Resources

Technical Consultants:

Jill DeBoer, Director of UMN Health Emergency Response Office; Deputy Director, Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP)
Cynthia Kenyon, Senior Epidemiologist, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH liaison)

Senior Staff:

Paige Rohman, Chief of Staff, University Services
Deborah Cran, Senior Assistant to the Executive Vice President and Provost
Kate Tyler, Assistant to the Executive Vice President and Provost

Appendix B: University Community Input

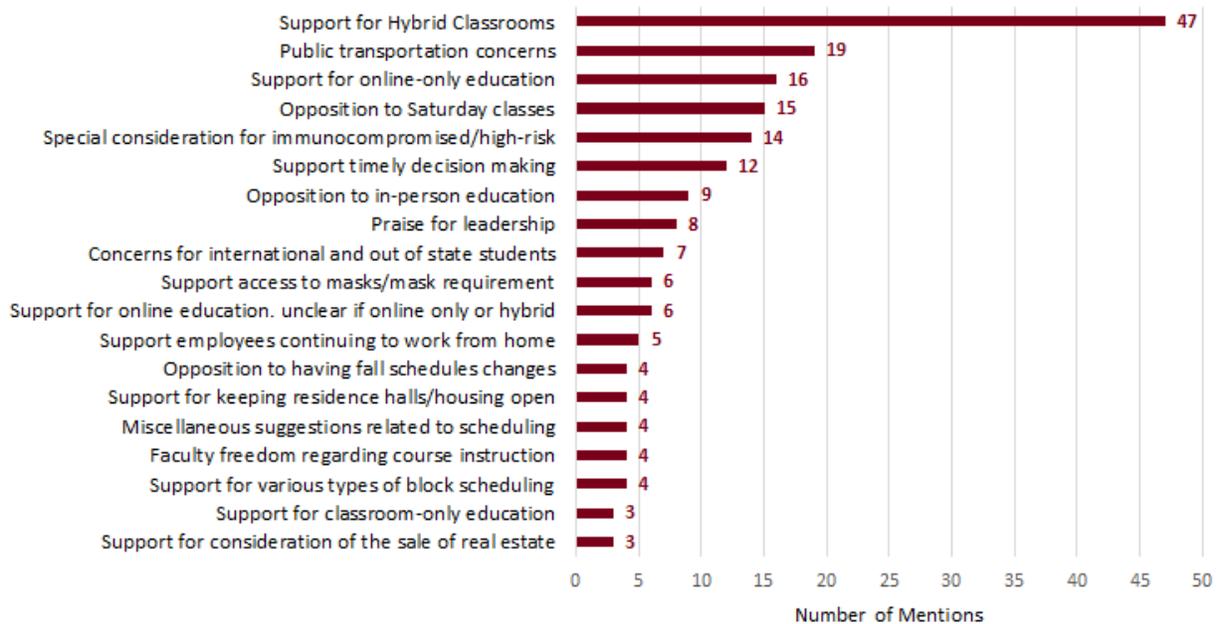
Systemwide Survey Responses

President Gabel’s message of May 14 was sent to all students, staff, and faculty systemwide. The message provided an abbreviated version of the executive summary of this report, and solicited feedback from the campus community via a direct link to a Qualtrics survey. In total, 145 responses were received. Of those, 86 (59%) were from students, 24 (17%) were from faculty and 35 (24%) were from staff.

Among primary themes identified through analysis by the Office of Measurement Services: 47 responses (32%) supported flexible instruction; 16 responses (11%) supported an online-only scenario; 9 responses (6%) opposed in-class instruction unless a vaccine were available; and 6 respondents (4%) supported online instruction (unclear if online-only or hybrid). Thus, in total, 25 (17%) supported distanced education. Three responses (2%) supported only in-person education.

Respondents also expressed other concerns: 19 comments (13%) expressed concern about the safety or feasibility of public transportation on which they relied to travel to and from campus; 15 (10%) expressed dissatisfaction with the prospect of Saturday classes; 14 (10%) supported the need for flexibility for vulnerable populations; and 7 comments (5%) specifically expressed concerns for out-of-state or international students.

Among other themes: 12 responses (8%) expressed concern about timely decision-making; 6 (4%) supported requiring facemasks; 5 asked for continued University support for employees working from home; 4 (3%) expressed opposition to having the days/times of their fall schedule altered; and 4 supported keeping residence halls open. Four comments (3%) expressed support for faculty freedom to determine course instruction.



Additional Input: Emails received

Additional input was provided through 13 emails received, directly or indirectly, that related to fall scenario planning. Of these, 6 (46%) were from parents of UMN students, 4 (3%) were from students, 2 (15%) were from faculty, and one sender was unknown.

Across the emails received: 5 commenters (38%) expressed support for in-person instruction only; 2 (15%) conveyed support for online only; and 2 (15%) expressed support for a flexible approach.

Summarizing additional topics or themes: 4 commenters expressed concerns about the quality of learning or the quality of the student experience in online approaches (as well as support for enhanced faculty training). 3 commenters expressed support for academic calendar adjustments (variously, online classes only during Thanksgiving week; fall-semester starting in mid-late summer and ending mid-October; and late start to school year/4-week modules).

Additionally, there were single comments across the 13 emails related to opposition to a shorter fall semester; opposition to Saturday classes; support for scenarios allowing on-campus living by freshman; support for cost reductions for online instruction; support for structural changes that would keep faculty and staff safe while avoiding fully online instruction; and concern about risks of in-person instruction and about potential logistical challenges for international students if models were in-person only.

Appendix C: Board of Regents Principles and their Applications

- Ensure the safety, health, and wellness of our students, faculty, and staff
While we recognize that no course of action (including shutting down all operations) will keep people perfectly safe, we will take steps to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 on our campus, to minimize the risks to those with heightened vulnerability, to rapidly respond to and contain any infection, and to protect the overall health and welfare of our students, faculty and staff.
- Ensure the continuity of the student academic experience and support research-related initiatives, including MNtersections
Our education and academic operations are pivotal for our students, the state, the nation and the world. Our goal is to continue to provide a world-class academic experience while protecting the health and welfare of our students, faculty and staff.
- Leverage the world-class excellence of our teaching, discovery, and engagement with an emphasis on research and discovery that directly addresses the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and serves the local, state and world communities
Our plan must preserve the academic enterprise that directly addresses the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, including coursework, research experiences for undergraduates, and public engagement.
- Examine the delivery of instruction and consider evolving learning models for the short- and long-term
Consider carefully when alternative modalities would and would not advance learning, safety, or both and implement those modalities thoughtfully.
- Make decisions with respect, transparency, and timeliness, and with the best interests of our students, faculty and staff in mind
Solicit input into the Fall decision, and communicate goals, constraints and expectations clearly. Incorporate flexibility and individual choice on the part of students, faculty and staff, into our planning.

Appendix D: Academic Policies to Review and Adjust if Needed

Students missing classes for bereavement or illnesses

[Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences: TC, Crookston, Morris, Rochester](#)

[Excused Absences: Duluth](#)

Students requesting an incomplete or withdrawal

[Grading and Transcripts: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester](#)

[Grading & Transcripts: Duluth](#)

Students needing a leave of absence

[Undergraduate: TC, Crookston, Morris & Rochester Leave of Absence and Reinstatement from a Leave: Graduate Students](#)

[Leave of Absence and Readmission for Undergraduates: Duluth](#)

Policies related to academic calendar

[Academic Calendars: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester](#)

Policies related to class scheduling

[Class Scheduling: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester](#)

[Class Scheduling Guidelines: Duluth](#)

Policies related to events

[Administrative Policy: Use and Lease of Real Estate](#)