

RECOVERY 2.0
FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE HUMAN RESTART IN THE
POST-ACUTE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Re-opening Universities Into a Very Different Worldview -- How My Thinking Has Changed

In my initial white paper, [which can be found on my website](#), the focus of re-entering back onto campus after the coronavirus pandemic was on rebuilding community in what I thought of as a post-pandemic period. This perspective centered around providing supports to students, faculty, staff, and administrators in addressing the trauma of the pandemic, the losses associated with the pandemic, and the confusion generated by the pandemic around various aspects of academic life.

As time has progressed past spring semester, some of the original assumptions in the first paper need to be reconsidered as reality has altered some of the basic assumptions, constituency needs, and various limitations and guidance from the health care and economic policy makers. Some of our institutions have made it clear that they intend to reopen in the fall. Others have already made the decision to postpone opening campuses and on-campus teaching. Each option poses special challenges for students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This paper will address some of the special challenges that reopening our campuses presents for our institutions with a focus on the educational enterprise.

Impact on Class Section Size (and all facilities.....)

Reopening the campus poses critical challenges for reinitiating the educational programs of our institutions. Likely, social distancing will still need to be enforced. This will require consideration for class size. Super sections with 75 or more students will almost certainly have to be taught on-line in either synchronous or asynchronous formats or with students in multiple classrooms set up for distance learning in which the lecture can be broadcast simultaneously to these classrooms in which students are adequately distanced. This will demand that schedules be revised to permit the use of multiple classrooms that would normally be occupied by other classes for the super sections. The laboratory or discussion sections that are often associated with these super sections will need to be smaller to accommodate appropriate social distancing. The addition of additional laboratory or discussion sections will require additional teaching assistants.

Smaller class sections that are normally 35 or 40 students will likewise require that they be divided into even smaller sections to maintain appropriate social distancing. My own experience as a faculty member would suggest that classrooms designed to

hold 35 or 40 students may at best be able to accommodate half that number of students in an appropriate social distancing setting, i.e., with students located a minimum of 6 feet apart. This will require more sections of these courses to meet demand. In turn, this may require hiring additional faculty to teach these sections. Moreover, the additional sections will require further revision of schedules since more classrooms will be needed to teach the same number of students. These changes will require that institutions give serious consideration to beginning the day much earlier than the standard 8:00 AM starting time. It will also require that serious consideration be given to classes continuing well into the evening, as well as consideration of a full-day schedule of Saturday classes, but Sunday classes may also be a necessity.

These changes in scheduling may well require vastly expanded summer sessions during summer 2021. Summer session offerings may look more like a standard academic term than the normal summer session. These expanded summer sessions will be needed to allow students to address the scheduling conflicts that will inevitably arise as the additional need for appropriate distanced sections make it impossible for many students to take all of the needed courses during the standard academic year.

When seeking faculty to teach these additional sections administrators may want to consider approaching recently and possibly even not so recently retired faculty. Many may be very interested in engaging with and teaching students particularly when that is the sole emphasis of their engagement with the institution.

The required additions to the schedule will also necessitate a review of curriculum. Can course sequencing be changed, with consideration given to the idea that courses that are generally sequenced could be taken simultaneously. It may even require that consideration be given to reducing the number of degree programs offered.

Addressing the Inevitable Corona Virus Cases

Beyond the scheduling logistics discussed in the above paragraphs, is the need to consider infection management and control. This will be true for staff, faculty, and students. Foremost, those of us in administration must set the example for all the others. If social distancing is still critical, then we must exhibit that behavior in any meeting we have with faculty, staff, or students. If the recommendation remains that face masks are still essential in those situations where social distancing is not possible or difficult to maintain, dining hall/food court lines, meeting rooms, and even in classrooms, we must be the ones to model that behavior.

But the core of being able to reopen successfully will depend on our institutions ability to effectively identify new infections, trace the contacts of those infections,

and contain and monitor both the newly infected person and the contacts. Without these elements being established the need to shutter the institution will be inevitable. This may require that we ask every administrator, faculty member, staff person and student to check their temperature each morning. It will necessitate that we instruct each member of our institutions on the other symptoms of the disease. And if they have a fever or have other symptoms, that they stay home and seek appropriate diagnostic testing. Moreover, Universities that choose to reopen will need to do everything possible to obtain or make available to all rapid diagnostic tests in which it is possible to quickly confirm whether the person is infected. In the alternative, if a person presents with symptoms and a standard test that takes 24 or more hours for the results to come back is the only option, then the administrator, staff person, or faculty member must remain home in quarantine until the results are returned. This needs to happen in my estimation without the person being charged with any form of time off or a class absence. Access to testing and supplies, cost consideration, frequency of testing, protocols for administering, handbooks revisions, policies and procedures are all factors to be considered. In a shared governance model, creating task forces to develop these procedures and policies will be critical.

For students, whether they live on campus or off-campus, accommodations must be set up in one of the residence halls to isolate these students once symptoms appear and until the test results are returned. For institutions without residential facilities, accommodations will need to be provided to safely isolate any students who exhibit symptoms or whose test results are positive.

And institutions must ensure that they or the local health department have sufficient tests on hand to test those who are infected and all contacts that may wish to be tested even if not exhibiting symptoms.

Establishing an Environment Supportive of Personal Responsibility for the Public Good

But for either administrators, faculty, staff or students to be willing to identify that they may be sick and to seek diagnostic testing we will need to engage in an educational process in which it will be clear to all, that there will be no reprisals for seeking testing based on symptoms. We will need to emphasize to all, that the recognition of the public good is essential for all to be safe and secure. That we have set up the necessary supports to help them weather both the time until the test results are returned and the illness if a test is positive. And that we will do everything within our power to mitigate any negative consequences of the illness. For administrators, faculty, and staff this may mean asking those with surplus sick time to add to whatever type of sick leave bank the institution may have established and allowing all to draw from that sick leave bank for the length of time the person

may be ill. It may even require permitting folks to draw on yet to be earned or deposited sick leave. For students this will mean establishing appropriate tutoring or even remedial sessions so that no course time or course credits are lost.

Addressing Test Results and Its Impacts

For those for whom results are negative, this will mean returning to work or classes.

Positive results will initiate a whole series of events in rapid succession. For administrators, faculty, and staff, they will need to isolate. If they cannot effectively isolate within their own homes, the institution may want to establish within the designated isolation resident hall several rooms for use by employees. For students, whether living on-campus or off-campus, it will be essential that we provide effective accommodations to isolate these students in a designated residence hall. For institutions without residential facilities thought needs to be given to and plans developed to provide proper supports to these students and if necessary, isolation accommodations to those who test positive for the duration of the illness. Particularly for students, we will need to ensure that adequate medical supports are available through our health service to monitor those who are ill and to seek hospitalization for them if symptoms worsen.

Contact Tracing and Preventing an Outbreak

Working either independently or with local health departments, probably the preferable alternative, there will need to be contact tracing. While there has been much discussion about the concept of electronic contact tracing, the reality is that contact tracing is more than simply identifying those with whom the infected person has come in contact. While class schedules will quickly provide a list of some of those with whom students and faculty will have had contact, the students and faculty in those classes are unlikely to be the only persons with whom the student and faculty have had contact. Information must also be sought from the student or faculty member about other contact. Administrators and staff will need to undergo a more standard contact tracing experience.

Well conducted contact tracing will be essential to ensuring that the campus does not experience an escalation of infected persons or create within the broader community a similar escalation. To address the need for contact tracing that reflects the impact of our campuses in our communities, it will require that we provide additional contact tracers, hired, paid for and trained by our institutions to the local health department, as well as the infrastructure needed to accommodate these additional contact tracers. This will be especially necessary for smaller institutions without large scale health care education programs and their attendant facilities. Furthermore, mechanisms will be necessary to permit these institutions to share

student contact information to permit collection of needed contact data. Contact tracers who are hired by the institution, even if working from a remote site in the local health department, should fall under the category of employees who can access student personal information under FERPA.

In situations in which the local health department does not see it as practicable to work in conjunction with the university or universities in its community, it will be essential for the university, or the universities working in concert to develop the appropriate infrastructure and hire and train its own contact tracers. But even in this situation, it will be essential that some data sharing arrangement occur in the eventuality that a community contact of the infected person also become infected. That person would rightfully be the responsibility of the local health department.

It is essential to remember that the need for isolation of the infected and quarantine of contacts is to reduce R_0 (r -naught) to something below 1.00, which is the only way to decrease the spread of the illness.

The Impact of Cases on the Educational Endeavor

The almost inevitable case will result in a significant disruption to the educational endeavor.

As an example, let us look at the effects on the academic schedule focusing on a single average full-time student being diagnosed with COVID-19. This student is taking four 3-credit hour classes. Given the social distancing in place, each of the four sections the student is enrolled in has only 15 students. Let us also assume, that there is no overlap in faculty or students enrolled in these sections. This requires contact tracing of 56 students and four faculty. These four sections at a minimum will have to be transitioned from on-ground to on-line courses. Decisions will need to be made as to whether the courses will be synchronous or asynchronous. But the actual number of courses that will likely have to be transitioned may be significantly higher since should any of the faculty or the students in the initial classes fall victim to the illness, all those classes would have to be transitioned. Mechanisms will need to either be maintained or put in place that will allow for the movement between on ground and on-line sessions. Syllabi will need to provide for the need to change or alter assignments. And these alternatives need to be clearly stated at the beginning of the term, so that there is minimal disruption to the process of the course. Arrangements will need to be in place to substitute faculty should one or more become ill with more than mild symptoms. Arrangements will also need to be in place for students who become ill with more than mild symptoms around make up classes and assignments. Policies need to be established concerning the ability of students to complete classes should they become ill with more than minor symptoms. Withdrawal policies need to be revised for those students who will need to withdraw due to illness, particularly

policies concerning late withdrawal. Advising concerning withdrawal from classes without penalty and assisting the student with revising his/her schedule should withdrawal be necessary will be essential. And almost all, if not all, of this advising will have to occur as an on-line process.

Should the impacts to a student's educational progress be such that time to degree completion is significantly altered, which I would define as an additional semester or more beyond the student's originally anticipated completion date, institutions will need to have in place appropriate financial resources and supports, including tuition refund mechanisms, so that students are not forced into having to choose between financial well-being and permanently withdrawing from their educational program.

Conclusion

These issues raised here are among the most critical that will need to be addressed prior to an institution moving toward reopening. Should an institution not be able to meet these basic concerns, it may be wiser for the institution to continue its current path of on-line teaching both for returning and new students.

If you and your organization would like to establish a conversation to continue exploring these challenges in more detail as they relate specifically to your institution, please contact me via the information provided below.

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