

## Recovery

### Planning for the Post-Coronavirus

#### Human Restart in our Higher Education Institutions

##### **What is needed now?**

We are all dealing with a major global transformational crisis with the coronavirus pandemic. From the personal to the professional, the approach to our lives has been challenged and we need to move beyond the fear and denial and consider what is next for higher education. What will life on campus be beyond the coronavirus situation that we are experiencing in spring of 2020 and what will a human restart look like?

##### **What does this new thinking look like?**

While there has been discussion about how to provide instruction, support and services to students, faculty and staff as they adjust to the current disruption of the novel coronavirus, we also need as higher education leadership to engage in advanced planning for the post-coronavirus period. Addressing the aftermath will be as important as wending our way through the crisis. While there has been significant discussion of the economic issues that institutions will face post-coronavirus, little attention has been paid to the human recovery that will face our institutions.

All university constituencies, administration, faculty, staff, students and the communities in which our institutions reside, will have issues that university leadership will need to address. Some of these issues will be addressed with simple solutions. However, many will require more complex solutions that will require coordination across constituencies and that may not please every constituency. Returning our campuses to normal social interactions will require leadership to begin from a premise that the common good that binds us together on campus must be paramount. Leadership will also need to recognize that recovery from this crisis may, in fact will likely, take longer than the time it took for us to respond to the crisis. Each constituent group will be addressed separately but concerns and reflections on one group likely apply to other groups as well.

##### **What about our students?**

While many institutions timed the announcement of the end of campus instruction with spring break, students still experienced an abrupt ending to on and around campus interactions with friends, faculty and staff. This needs to be viewed as a traumatic ending particularly for graduating seniors and graduate students.

Required practicums, such as clinical placements, internships, study abroad, externships, etc. ended abruptly. For students scheduled to graduate at the end of the academic term, leadership will need to advocate for waivers of placements with credentialing organizations and licensing agencies. We will also need to advocate for modifications for these students to licensing regulations. For returning students in these programs, we will need to address how we help these students quickly get back on track so they can graduate with little or no delay.

Many graduate students will have experienced a significant delay or sudden end to their research and dissertation projects. This will delay their degree completion and will require support from our institutions so that they can quickly get their projects up and running once we return to normal operations.

For those who were to be honored for accomplishments during the year, the honor's convocation at many institutions, as well as for those whose commencements were cancelled, an appropriate ceremony should be considered to recognize both these accomplishments. To the extent possible, these ceremonies need to be distinct from a fall commencement ceremony if your institution has one. The closer to the beginning of the academic year these ceremonies are held, the clearer they will connect emotionally and allow for closure for all to the abruptly ended academic year.

As we begin the next academic year, institutions will need to pay special attention to those events that reunite our academic communities. If your institution engages in a beginning of the year convocation to welcome new students, it might be useful to consider inviting any student who wishes, to attend the convocation. Inclusion of faculty and staff in the ceremony in an expanded role will also help emphasize the reconnection to the academic community. It will also be useful if the institution engages in an activity that reflects both the university and the broader community. This might be a barbeque, an ice cream social, or another activity that reflects the broader community. It will be important to invite local leaders to participate in this experience to reinforce for students, and community leadership that all are engaged in a common endeavor.

Institutions will have returning students who contracted COVID-19, as well as students who had friends, family members and other relatives who contracted COVID-19. For students for whom this is the case, and where the symptoms were not mild, it is likely that dealing with the illness and its recovery will have impacted the student's ability to participate in on-line classes. Mechanisms need to be in place to permit students to successfully complete classes without adding additional time to degree completion. The same will be true for students who were required to care for family and relatives. Also, of importance, and this will apply to faculty, staff and administrators who contracted the disease as well, will be

ensuring that they are not stigmatized or shunned by other members of the community. It will be important for all to understand that these members of the community are no longer contagious, and in fact may be our first line of defense in the event of another round of illness.

Another critical factor that will need to be addressed is that many students will have been unemployed during a period when they normally would have been employed. It will also be important to recognize that other aspects of their economic support system, parents, spouses, will similarly have been impacted by the various mitigation measures. Institutions will need to find ways to support these students financially when they return, whether that student lives on or off campus.

Given the initial estimates of mortality for this illness, it is possible that your institution will have experienced the death of a student, faculty member, staff member or administrator. It will be important for the institution to appropriately note those deaths and even provide for rituals around the grieving process.

For some students, this illness, the surrounding events, the possible death of family members, and a disregard initially by some for engaging in social distancing behavior may create symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress, or survivor's guilt. It will be essential that appropriate mental health or spiritual services be available to all who may need them.

### **What about our faculty?**

Daily living has been disrupted for many faculty members who have been asked to change the way they teach, conduct research, and service. For some, tenure, promotion and post-tenure review will be a concern. While many institutions include either in their collective bargaining agreements or in their faculty employment policies conditions under which faculty may request a hold on their tenure clock, in my experience, faculty members are often unaware that such a provision exists. Moreover, in my experience, few include a *force majeure* as a reason for requesting that a tenure clock be stopped. It will be important for leadership to inform faculty that making this request is an option, and even encouraged. It will be important for leadership to discuss the time frame for the hold. From a practical standpoint, a full year's delay may be the most practicable.

Of equal importance many faculty will be restarting their research. It is likely that research involving animals has continued given the strict guidelines governing such research. It is also likely that some bench sciences research may have continued as well. For others in the bench sciences, the behavioral and social sciences, and the humanities, it is likely that much of the research in these fields came to a halt as needed supplies for the bench research, research subjects or primary sources became unavailable. This will require research offices to negotiate with funders for

extensions to the funding. Research principles may have to hire new research assistants and train them. In some cases, this may take several months from the time campuses reopen to when the research will be back in the laboratory or field. Leadership needs to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to help faculty resume their research operations.

Among the casualties of this pandemic may be day care and other childcare facilities. This will mean that some of our faculty will need assistance in finding new childcare options.

In clinical programs, many of the faculty will have been redirected to direct practice to address the demand for skilled personnel. Other faculty will have been engaged in double duty, providing on-line instruction and providing care to both children and in some cases ill family members and relatives. Leadership will need to help clinical faculty and others make the transition back into the classroom. While it would be easy to assume that this transition should be simple, my experience as a mental health clinician has taught me to never assume that the transition back from a traumatic disruption will be easy for all. Moreover, while many of the faculty will have successfully made the initial transition to on-line education and thus their teaching reputations among students will remain untarnished, others will not have been so successful. It is entirely possible that their teaching reputations will have been damaged, and student perceptions of these faculty will be warped. Our teaching enhancement and development offices need to be prepared to offer support as the transition back to the classroom occurs.

As with students, some of our faculty will have experienced loss related to this illness. We will need to ensure that appropriate emotional and mental health supports are available to them as well.

### **What about our staffs?**

This may be one of the more complex constituent groups which leadership will have to address. Included in this group are academic professionals, such as admissions staff, financial aid staff, the registrar's office, advising and others, the student affairs professionals, including student housing, student recreation, mental health and medical professionals, as well as our human resources professionals, those working in the various budget and finance offices, and our athletic professionals. Many of these professionals, while the campus has been closed, have had to conduct business in innovative ways given that much of what they do requires person-to-person contact. Supervisory personnel for these staff will need to address how to appropriately modify performance expectations that reflect the altered reality in which they have had to operate.

Support staff, such as administrative assistants and secretaries, hourly employees,

such as those working in food services, custodial employees and other maintenance staff who were deemed as non-essential will need to be addressed. Many of these workers will have been working closely with their principals but doing this from a distance, while at the same time providing childcare and/or supportive care to a family member who contracted the disease. We need to make sure that they are also assisted in making the transition back to normal operations.

In some institutions, workers in certain categories are employed only during the academic year and will have found themselves on hiatus much earlier than expected. We will need to provide these academic year employees with appropriate supports as they return to work.

Other staff in this broad category will be those who were deemed essential such as those in public safety and those responsible for maintaining various systems and operations, HVAC being the perfect example. Leadership will need to be cognizant that employees will have been away from their families during periods of “stay-in-place” orders. Many will have been at increased risk of exposure. We will need to provide appropriate supports to these employees as their operations return to normal. These may be employees for whom the institution needs to provide some special recognition for their dedication during this crises.

As with the previous groups discussed in this paper, some of these employees will have contracted the disease. We will need to ensure that they are not stigmatized which may mean conducting educational meetings with staff. Some of these employees will have experienced a loss due to the illness, we will need to ensure that emotional and spiritual supports are available to them. And some of them may have succumbed to this illness. We will need to ensure that they are memorialized along with any others who may have died.

### **What about the administration?**

It is often easy to forget how large a group this is. It encompasses more than just the President (I am using this term and all subsequent terms generically for the Chief Executive Officer of a campus and the heads of various portfolios). This can be Vice Presidents, all of the Associate Vice-Presidents, Assistant Vice-Presidents, and Directors in their offices, the Provost, all of the Associate Provosts, Assistant Provosts and Directors under the chief academic officers portfolio, the Deans, Associate and Assistant Deans and Directors who report to them, as well as Department Chairs.

Many, if not most, will have put in as many, if not more, hours during this crisis than they might in a normal week or month. They will have dealt with all of the issues that normally arise during this period, including preparing next year’s budget, academic schedules and how those will need to be modified for the coming

year given the crisis. They will have had to address suspended searches and how and when to reinstate them. They will have also had to deal with the unique issues engendered by this pandemic. Issues with on-line education on a much larger scale than usual and the need to monitor what is happening with the faculty and staff for whom they are responsible.

They will also have begun planning for the financial repercussions from this pandemic, as well as the human repercussions, some of which this paper has attempted to identify. An additional consideration which will need to be addressed is what policy will the institution adopt related to any vaccine developed for this disease. For whom, if any employees, will it be mandatory? Will this vaccine be added to the list of required vaccinations for students?

With all of this going on, plus the issues that will be involved with any restart, both financial and human, it will be easy for administrators to neglect their own well-being. As they return to a more normal working schedule on campus, I would urge members of the administration to build in some dedicated times to reconnect. Choose activities for this reconnection that fit the culture of the unit or institution. However, try to make these activities about something other than unit or institutional issues that must be addressed. Make them an opportunity to reengage on a personnel level. Prepare to be supportive, since one or more may have contracted COVID-19, others may have lost a friend, family member or relative.

Take some individual time to recharge. It may be important as the head of a group of administrators to set up a schedule where each of the administrators who is a direct report indicates when they intend to take some time away. It may be only for two or three days, but it will be important for each person to decompress. This will also entail that when the administrator leaves, it clear that within very narrowly defined exceptions, that whoever is designated as the acting person responsible for a portfolio will handle any issues that arise.

A final concern for all in administration will be to be cognizant if any member of their team is showing signs of post-traumatic stress, survivor's guilt or grief and if so encouraging them to seek appropriate support.

### **What about our supporting communities?**

All our institutions reside in a community. The businesses and leaders of those communities have employed our students and supported our institutions. We need to be prepared to work with those businesses by supporting them as they move to resume normal operations. We need to support the cultural and entertainment entities in our communities as they also move to emerge from closures. And we need to support our governmental institutions as they also work to return to normal. Join in whatever celebrations or memorials they schedule as our communities emerge

from this forced separation. Remind them that we recognize their importance to our success.

**What is next?**

This white paper discusses my reflections on some of the human issues that our institutions will face as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not exhaustive. Having in-depth energetic conversations will be needed by leadership to look beyond the current crisis and determine how to jump start our institutions. I offer this as a way to start those conversations and will be available to facilitate other aspects that are unique to your campus. We are in this together and we need to all identify the areas of the human recovery that will need to be considered as we emerged from this disruption. Please feel free to contact me to continue this important conversation.

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