PROTECTING
Vulnerable Students During the Pandemic

INSIDE HIGHER ED

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A compilation of *Inside Higher Ed*'s best coverage of how COVID-19 and the recession were affecting underserved college students during the spring of 2020.

Editor's Letter

The pandemic's impact on higher education was felt early and profoundly. And the unprecedented change it and the accompanying economic crisis brought to colleges and universities immediately exacerbated existing challenges for students from low-income backgrounds and those who are working adults or members of minority groups.

In March, colleges across the country rapidly moved their instruction online, closed residence halls and brought most of their campus operations to a halt. This disruption was painful for all college students, who experienced an abrupt end to their semesters on campus. But it was especially hard for students who weren't able to easily return to their parents' homes, or who lacked adequate internet access for courses now hosted on Zoom.

Even in a pandemic, Americans remain fixated on the tiny swath of higher education that features highly selective admissions. To that end, the White House in April picked a fight with Ivy League and other institutions with multi-billion-dollar endowments, calling on them to reject federal stimulus funds. *Inside Higher Ed* covered that news. But our reporters were more focused on how the twin crises were disrupting open-access colleges and the lives of the majority of students who attend them.

On April 23 we published a news article on how Princeton, Stanford and Harvard Universities declined millions in stimulus funds. That day we also published a piece by Colleen Flaherty, our veteran reporter covering faculty issues, which explored how lenient instructors could and should be with their students on deadlines, attendance, grading and more. And we ran an opinion piece by a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, about how colleges should be proactive in creating more equitable transfer pathways for students.

This booklet includes those two articles and more like them. While not comprehensive, it features our strongest news and opinion pieces on the pivot to remote instruction and campus closures, with a focus on underserved student populations and what this tsunami of change means for their finances, housing, mental health and ability to transfer or complete college.

This compilation gives an inside look at a historic time of turbulence for higher education. We've organized it by key topics and takeaways from our coverage and have included the publication dates for each included news or opinion piece. In addition, the booklet includes an exclusive reported analysis that gives an overview of where things stood for higher education and lower-income students in early June, and what might come next.

As a publication with a wide lens on postsecondary education and training, *Inside Higher Ed* will continue to write about the pandemic and recession with a particular focus on vulnerable students. We're proud of the coverage in this booklet and appreciate our readers for tuning in, our sources for helping us stay informed and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for providing funding to help make it possible.

Sincerely,

Paul Fain
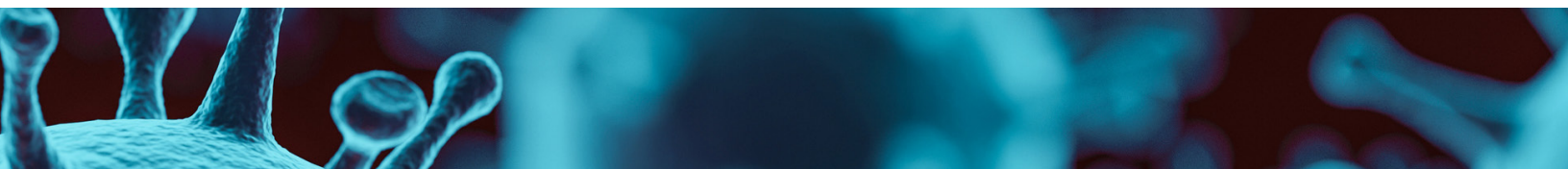News editor, *Inside Higher Ed*

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Two months of chaos have forever changed higher education, while exacerbating its already deep equity gaps.

By Paul Fain // Special to This Publication

SOURCE:ISTOCK.COM/FGTRADE

A maxim about the early days of the coronavirus pandemic is that it exposed the true nature of everything in society.

For higher education, that meant sandblasting into stark relief the fact that far too many students who are low income and members of minority groups continue to leave college without earning credentials, or take on student loan debt that doesn't pay off in the job market.

"The toll of this pandemic is, in a word, devastating," John B. King Jr., president and CEO of the Education Trust and U.S. education secretary during the Obama administration, said during a webcast with reporters in late May. "It's eroding students' academic success, their emotional well-being and their personal finances."

Skepticism about higher education's value was on the rise before the pandemic, with a growing coalition — featuring many of the industry's historic allies like Democrats and equity-focused groups — calling for systemic change. That pressure is certain to increase as unemployment rates top 20 percent and Americans face increasingly difficult fiscal challenges.

Some indicators during the first few months of the crisis suggest that many lower-income college students may leave higher education entirely in coming months, or that prospective students from underserved backgrounds will be less likely to enroll in the first place. And that could have far-reaching consequences. While higher education is far from perfect — fully half of black students who borrow to attend college default on their student loans — having some form of college credential remains the best bet for finding a well-paying job and entering the middle class, even amid a pandemic.

The National College Attainment Network (NCAN) has been tracking renewals of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to understand which students may not return to college. Federal data the group analyzed showed a steep decline in renewals compared to last year, particularly among low-income students.

Through April 15, overall FAFSA renewals were down 4.7 percent compared to last year — a decline of more than 350,000 students, NCAN found. The drop in renewals during this aid cycle more than doubled since late February, when total completions were 2.3 percent lower than on the same date last year.

The total number of renewals from students with annual family incomes of less than $25,000 was down by more than 8 percent, compared to a 4 percent decline for those with family incomes of $25,000 to $50,000, and just 1 percent for those with incomes of more than $50,000.

The first half of May, however, featured gains in FAFSA renewals across the board for students, said Bill DeBaun, NCAN's director of data and evaluation.

"Take your silver linings where you can," he said, but he noted that the gains were "not nearly enough to make up for March and April."

Either Unemployed or an Essential Worker

It's too early to say why so many low-income students appear to be on the verge of leaving higher education. But many of them and their families have lost jobs and taken other financial hits. And if they are working, lower-income Americans are far more likely to have had jobs in the service sector or other industries that are deemed essential (and therefore involve higher risks of being exposed to the virus).

Among American adults who were working in February, 39 percent of those with an annual household income below $40,000 reported a job loss in March, with another 6 percent of all adults having had their hours or pay cut, according to a May report from the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

Workers with higher levels of education, particularly bachelor's degrees, also have been much more likely to have a job that allowed them to work from home during the crisis. The report found that 63 percent of workers with at least a bachelor's degree were working entirely from home. But just 20 percent of those with a high school credential or less, and 27 percent with an associate degree or some college credits, were working entirely from home.

Uncertainty and Resolve

Anxiety is running high among college students, particularly students of color, about their ability to stick with higher education.

A national poll of college students conducted in May by the Education Trust and Global Strategy Group found that 77 percent of respondents were concerned about being on track to graduate from their program. And those concerns were higher among black students (84 percent) and Latinx students (81 percent).

With vulnerable college students "shouldering heavy burdens of stress," King said, "many may soon not be students at all anymore. They're considering leaving school."

Kim Cook, NCAN's executive director, also pointed to stress and general uncertainty amid the pandemic as factors for low-income students as they consider whether to continue with college.

"We're already asking them to take on a lot of uncertainty," she said, adding that "any uncertainty can really rattle you, particularly if you're the first in your family to go to college."

College leaders also are facing a tremendous amount of uncertainty.

Most public colleges, which serve the vast majority of lower-income and adult students, are facing potentially severe budget cuts unless the federal government sends more stimulus money to states and local governments. And even a substantial federal subsidy likely would fall short amid huge reductions in tax revenues in states and potential declines in student enrollments this fall.

"We recognize that the carpet's been pulled from under the economy. That impacts directly our community colleges in California

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/FIZKES

and across the nation," said Eloy Ortiz Oakley, chancellor of the California community college system, which enrolls more than two million students, most of them lower income. "So we're preparing scenarios for some significant budget reductions over the next year or two."

Community colleges and open-access four-year colleges also must be particularly well attuned to the workforce, now more than ever, so they can best ensure they are preparing students for jobs. And many questions loom about the economy in the coming months.

"Pathways from education to work require there to be work," said Brian Sponsler, vice president of policy for the Education Commission of the States. "And at 20 to 25 percent unemployment, what do these connections between education and work look like?"

Yet in interviews, many community college and other open-access college leaders expressed cautious optimism that they would be able to adjust amid all the uncertainty.

One reason, said Karen Stout, president and CEO of Achieving the Dream, is that community colleges have been in the forefront of developing online and hybrid course offerings. And she said community colleges have been drawing on lessons learned during the Great Recession, such as how to be more flexible in course scheduling and delivery options.

"As a sector, community colleges are well positioned to move from what has been emergency remote learning into a more decisive path about how to support student-learning needs going forward," Stout said. "In this COVID experiment, many of our community colleges have been able to deliver really important

universal remote support services to students, for things that they need outside of the classroom, that I know my colleagues want to continue through COVID and post-COVID."

Despite all the uncertainty, it's clear that the economy will need trained workers in many sectors during the recovery, said Steven Johnson, president of Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio.

The community colleges across the country have the capacity to educate and train students. And Johnson said Sinclair is up to the challenge.

"We're going to roll up our sleeves and do what we need to do to get through this," he said of the attitude in Dayton. "And it's not just survive, but how do we recast that which we are so that we are thriving when we get on the other side." ■
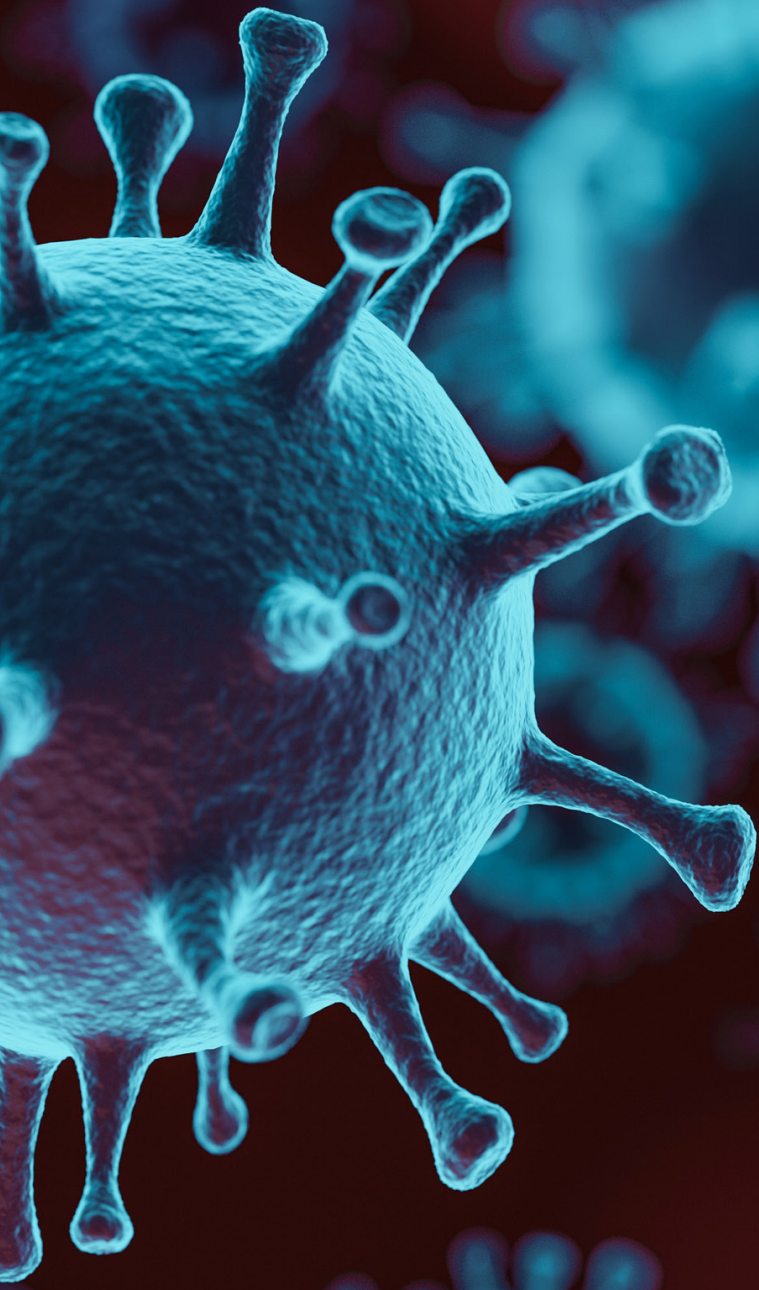
COMPLETION AND TRANSFER

Key Takeaways:

- Most colleges have moved to pass/fail to help students, but binary grading creates challenges as students transfer or apply to graduate or medical school.

- Professors have cut nonessential course content, moved deadlines and begun grading more leniently.

- Colleges should take a proactive, holistic approach to creating more equitable transfer pathways for students.

- Higher education needs a national coalition to keep and recruit students, particularly those at risk, and to build a lasting digital infrastructure.

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
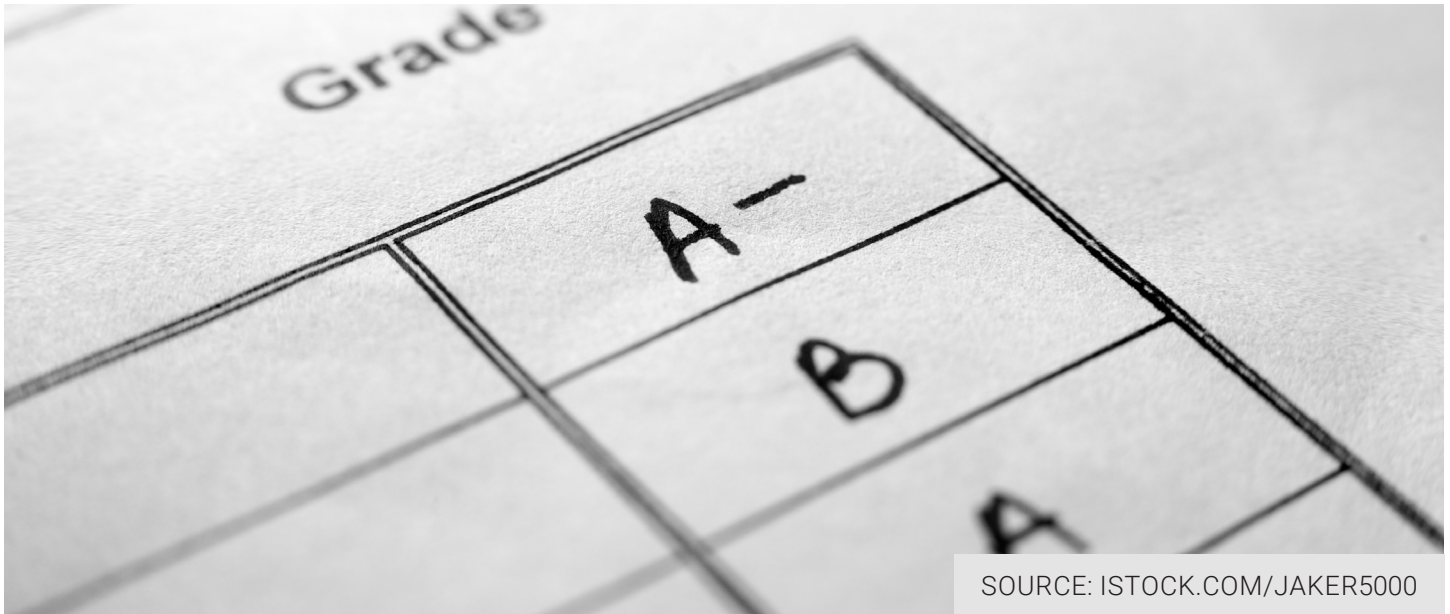
SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/JAKER5000

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 application, 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 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-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

The Asterisk Semester (cont.)

Spring 2020," the announcement said. "We understand that many institutions across the country instituted P/NP grading 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 something we call 'holistic admissions consideration,'" she said. "Not as many universities have issued formal statements yet, but I think its 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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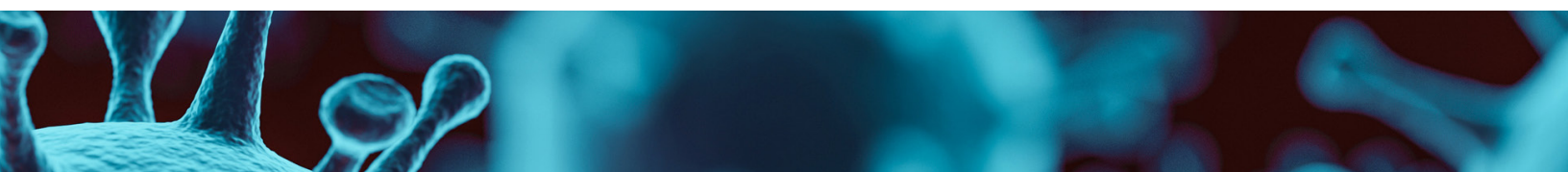
How lenient, or not, should professors be with students right now?

By **Colleen Flaherty** // **April 23, 2020**

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/FIZKES

Steven D. Krause, professor of English at Eastern Michigan University, says he used to be a stickler for deadlines and attendance. He deducted letter grades for assignments every 72 hours that they were late and failed students who didn't contribute to virtual class discussions. Then COVID-19 happened.

Now, he says, "I'm starting to really rethink the value of being such a hard-ass instead of trying to be like an empathetic human."

Why the shift? Krause says he uncharacteristically spent a few hours trying to track down students who hadn't checked in or who missed deadlines during the pandemic. He found out they were really struggling, with unemployment, extra caregiving, hospital jobs that had them overwhelmed or scared (or both), and poor or no internet service at home.

Those conversations prompted Krause to extend deadlines, abandon penalties for late work and cut big chunks of assignments due at the end of term. The revelations also prompted Krause to write a blog post called "No One Should Fail a Class Because of a Fucking Pandemic."

"I have told students repeatedly that as long as they stay in touch with me and as long as they give it all a try, they will all at least pass the class," he wrote. "Because look, even my hard-assed, aloof professor persona believes no one should fail a class because of a fucking pandemic."

Beyond Pass/Fail

Beyond pass/fail policies, which are generally adopted at the institutional level, individual professors are cutting nonessential course content, moving deadlines to the end of the term, dropping low assignment grades and grading leniently overall.

Historian Kevin Gannon, director of the Center for Excellence in

Grading for a Pandemic (cont.)

Teaching at Grand View University and author of Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto (West Virginia University Press), out this month, said he's a "big proponent of adjusting our grading significantly" right now.

It's impossible to argue that students are getting the same experiences and opportunities via remote learning during the public health crisis. "So to assess like that's still the case is ludicrous," he said. Many students are doing extra caregiving and other work, for example, while campus closures mean that they can't access libraries, tutoring and support services like they did before.

Grading as if things are "normal," Gannon said, "strikes me as the equivalent of giving someone a swimming test during a flood."

In a survey of professors released this week by Bay View Analytics, almost two-thirds of respondents said they changed "the kinds of assignments or exams" they gave to students in the switch to remote learning. Just about half said they lowered their expectations for the amount of work students would be able to do. The same share also "dropped some assignments or exams."

Roughly one-third of the sample "lowered the expectations about the quality of work that my students will be able to do." Fewer respondents (18 percent) said they dropped some planned readings.

Gannon said that just how professors adjust coursework and assessment is up to them alone.

"It's such a context-dependent thought process in so many ways, so faculty are the best positioned to make the most equitable decisions."

Not a 'Real A'?

Not all professors are changing their expectations for students. Some faculty members report hearing from their students that their other professors are refusing to shift deadlines or attendance policies for synchronous class meetings, for example.

Those professors probably have some fans outside academe. David Brooks, for instance, wrote a recent New York Times column saying that grade inflation and other means of "coddling" students have gone way too far, especially in certain fields. He argued that this is an opportunity to reset, as training a young person means "training her or him to master hardship, to endure suffering and, by building something new from the wreckage, redeem it."

Still, many professors strongly disagree that now is the time to talk about putting students through an academic crucible.

Jessica Calarco, associate professor of sociology at Indiana University, said she'd seen criticisms of relaxed grading policies for students on social media, such as "Who would want a doctor who didn't get a real A?"

Her response? "I'd personally argue that someone shouldn't be prevented from being a doctor in the future because of hardships they're facing in their life right now."

In Calarco's own classes, she's focused on "giving my students the opportunity to learn, as opposed to holding them accountable for achieving a set of learning outcomes. I'm giving my students, as equitably as possible, a chance to keep learning the materials that they came into the course expecting to learn."

She added, "Whatever they want to get out of it or are able to get out of it is OK with me. I don't want to be a stressor, adding that to their lives in what is already a challenging moment."

Student Response

To Calarco, grades right now aren't necessarily a measure of skills or ability, but rather the socioeconomic and other privileges students have — or don't. No one in her classes will get a worse grade than they had pre-pandemic. Students were incredulous at first, she said.

How is the approach working? For a class of 250 students, Calarco

lectures live on Microsoft Teams. About 30 to 50 students show up for each session, and others watch the videos and read the transcripts later.

Krause emphasized in an email that he's not relaxing standards but adopting "pandemic emergency standards." In any case, he said, "my students are with me on this. I have a few students who would have otherwise had better grades who are going to opt into the pass/fail option, and sure, I probably have some students taking advantage of the lightened load. And there's been a little grade-grubbing, but whatever, that happens almost every term. Mostly I think my students are grateful."

As for pass/fail, Calarco said she worried about institutions making it an option rather than a requirement. The former, she said, "leaves a student vulnerable to judgment for choosing pass/fail."

Prerequisites

Harvard Medical School, as one example, has said that it will not accept pass/fail grades in prerequisite courses from applicants who chose that method of grading where it was optional. It will, however, accept pass/fail prerequisite course grades from students that attend institutions where it is a blanket policy. (Harvard University's undergraduate college adopted a universal pass/fail policy last month).

> " I have told students repeatedly that as long as they stay in touch with me and as long as they give it all a try, they will all at least pass the class. "
>
> *Steven D. Krause, professor of English at Eastern Michigan University*

Amihai Glazer, professor of economics at the University of California, Irvine, wrote in an *Inside Higher Ed* column that institutions should consider canceling spring terms where possible. Short of that, Glazer said in an interview that professors might relax standards for some students right now — but not all.

Specifically, Glazer advocated maintaining typical standards for upper-division courses populated by students closest to graduation.

"They won't have time to make it up," he said. "And lowering standards for upper-division classes will hurt students once they're on the job market."

Junior and senior engineering students will soon graduate and encounter opportunities that require they know about bridge design, for example, Glazer said. Any program that doesn't demand that they struggle to understand that topic — or to discover they

don't like it, or that it's not one of their strengths — will fail them.

Giving all students A's, as has been proposed by some student advocates, would also hurt students on the job market, Glazer said, arguing that employers are savvy enough to know which institutions or programs are doing so. Moreover, employers who typically recruit top students from lesser-known programs might discriminate on similar grounds, if everyone in their year gets an A.

"This idea that we're punishing students if they don't all get high grades assumes employers are stupid," Glazer said.

What about students who don't necessarily want to be engineers or work in one specific field?

Glazer said he didn't know the ins and outs of, say, English literature prerequisites. He did suggest that professors consider relaxing standards for nonmajors who

are only taking their courses as electives or general education requirements, however, so that they may focus on their major courses.

Opportunity vs. Evaluation

Christina DeJong, an associate professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University, is teaching a prerequisite course in introduction to linear regression for first-year doctoral students. Her options for cutting content are few, as students need to be prepared for the next course in the sequence.

That said, DeJong removed individual deadlines so that students may prioritize other classes with unchanged due dates. She also decided to drop each student's two lowest assignment grades this term.

So far, students in that class are "are highly motivated and haven't seemed to have any trouble."

For her undergraduate general education courses, DeJong did cut some material so students could prioritize courses within their majors. She also removed due dates so students could work at their own pace. And she let students know the minimum points required for each letter grade so they could set their own priorities, based on their specific needs.

For obvious reasons, this academic term is unique. But Calarco said the experience has increased her interest in ungrading, a growing movement that embraces ongoing formative feedback over summative assessments.

"I'm seriously looking at moving ahead with that in future semesters," she said, "making myself an opportunity for students to learn, instead of an evaluator of students' learning." ◼

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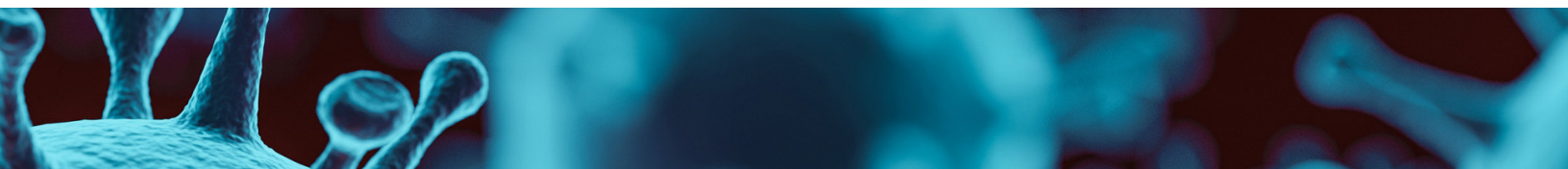
Opinion: Colleges Should Cultivate More Equitable Transfer Pathways

Equitable transfer for students is more pressing than ever during the pandemic, and institutions should take a more proactive and holistic approach, writes Xueli Wang.

By Xueli Wang // April 23, 2020

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/RADACHYNSKYI

It comes as no surprise that transfer is a core mission for community colleges, with nearly four-fifths of their over eight million students intending to attain a bachelor's degree. Yet only a quarter of those transfer-intending students actually transfer within six years, signaling a huge gap between students' goals and what transpires. This issue permeates all areas of study but is particularly pronounced in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, with only 12 percent of these students transferring within six years. In a similar fashion, the structural and institutional barriers inequitably experienced by transfer-aspiring students manifest across all fields but are noticeably magnified in STEM.

On both ends of the transfer equation, two-year and four-year institutions need to wrestle harder with the question: Why is there such a huge gap?

I offer some answers in my new book, *On My Own: The Challenge and Promise of Building Equitable STEM Transfer Pathways*. Based on a longitudinal, mixed methods research project following nearly 1,670 two-year college students as they navigated STEM courses, programs and the prospect of transfer, I revealed disparities and inequities that permeated the students' paths toward or away from transfer — with students of color, women, students with mental health issues or learning disabilities, first-generation students, and those from lower-income backgrounds often facing the largest hurdles.

Yet these students held fiercely to their high aspirations and strong perseverance and agency, pushing through structural barriers in hopes of realizing their immense

talent. Those hurdles revolved around finances, advising, teaching and learning, institutional services, competing life and job obligations, and more. The types of challenges and barriers are by no means an individual student's problem to resolve. Instead, they reflect the inequitable transfer mechanisms systemically in place and in need of disruption.

How do we combat the structural barriers instead of defaulting to students' own initiatives — leaving them to navigate the imperfect system on their own? In my book and a recent *Inside Higher Ed* article, I outlined a number of intertwined structural, systemic, interpersonal and cultural issues to be addressed. In this piece, I place a more explicit focus on institutional responsibilities: How can we, as institutions sending and receiving transfers, provide high-quality, equitable support for transfer-aspiring students?

Transfer-receiving and transfer-sending institutions are equally responsible. The politics around two-year to four-year articulation can be contentious. Much of that has to do with a lack of trust between some four-year and two-year faculty members, including unjust stigma associated with community colleges and their students, as well as power issues around who controls the curriculum, student learning outcomes and, ultimately, which courses are deemed "rigorous"

enough to transfer. Four-year institutions and faculty are a crucial part of making articulation and transfer work. But the issue is often complicated by a general lack of initiative, understanding and respect for the quality of community college courses. We must break down such dynamics and recognize both sides' common interest in and commitment to students and their success.

To fully realize a shared responsibility, four-year institutions need to step up and carry more of the weight that community colleges have historically shouldered. That starts with elevating community colleges as equal partners and contributors and compelling four-year institutions to re-examine their perceptions. Guided by a genuine spirit of equal partnership, both ends can productively co-create learning objectives, streamline courses across institutions and align course requirements. Plus, four-year faculty and advising roles should explicitly involve efforts that facilitate transfer. Only then can these institutions create a smoother and more collaborative transfer process, moving toward what Dimpal Jain and colleagues referred to as a transfer receptive culture.

Cultivating inclusive classroom environments and experiences is crucial. As part of their shared responsibility, institutions and faculty must constantly reflect on

and revisit their current practices within campuses and classrooms in order to create truly inclusive and empowering environments that support all students — especially those historically underserved student populations in general and in STEM. Specifically, instructors cannot and should not focus solely on who the majority is in the classroom or the overall satisfaction level when it comes to student feedback and course evaluations. Challenging ourselves as instructors and pinpointing problem spots can transform the classroom experience, especially for students who feel marginalized and overlooked.

That means that addressing implicit bias, stereotype threats, racism, sexism and other types of bias and discrimination is essential. Only then can instructors remove previously unchecked friction in this space, resulting in classrooms as safe havens for minoritized students to explore and cultivate their interests in STEM fields and transfer. Otherwise, persistent inequitable and less-than-supportive experiences will only reinforce disparities in the paths these students take toward or away from transfer and STEM.

Along the same lines, instructors need to honor and encompass more diverse learning styles and cultivate culturally responsive approaches to better support students of color, women, older

students and other underserved students. Universal design for learning is a great starting framework. Further, instilling a community environment — a significant cultural component for students of color, according to Gloria Ladson-Billings — will go a long way toward developing more inclusive learning spaces.

Advising approaches must support the whole person. There are two issues related to advising for transfer. The first involves inadequate, or a complete absence of, advising. The second entails a lack of a humanistic, culturally receptive and responsive advising relationship. Many community colleges are severely underresourced, with a student-to-adviser ratio in the hundreds or even thousands. This makes an advising redesign critical, and it must be systemwide.

Some institutions have explored more innovative options to try and fill advising gaps. Nudging has gained momentum recently with great promise, yet large-scale efforts remain questionable. That approach can help communicate timely information to more students, but in the end, nothing can replace direct and personal human interaction between advisers and students. Other student-centered approaches can help students overcome challenges; leverage their existing knowledge, skills and motivation; and place them in a

more active or central role. These strategies and carefully nurtured relationships can make students feel that their college sees them, hears them and cares about them as individuals within their distinct lives and contexts.

In this rapidly changing environment that we are all experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic, relationship building is and will continue to be even more essential. Institutional leaders, instructors, advisers and students should all be lauded for their agility and innovative use of technology in the face of the challenges imposed by social distancing orders and rapidly changing directives. However, in order to not leave the most vulnerable behind, we need to be especially sensitive of the challenges confronted by those for whom these changes make progress toward educational goals nearly impossible, and do our best to help meet those students' needs.

An equity-oriented policy environment allows the true value and mission of transfer to be fully realized. While I highlight the importance of putting the responsibility back on institutions, we can't deny that institutions are constrained within the larger policy landscape, an issue accented by a long history of undervaluing and underfunding of community colleges by state and federal governing bodies. To complicate things further, when performance-

or outcomes-based funding is applied, funding inequity is amplified when transfer is not part of the formula applied to both two-year and four-year institutions.

The jury is also still out on the effectiveness of state articulation policies. These policies inherently trickle down to institutions and practitioners to operationalize. So as long as these problems persist, students will continue to encounter a lack of clear and flexible course-, program- and institution-specific sequences and articulation agreements.

While state policies provide overarching and crucial support in facilitating transfer, we also cannot overlook the vital role institutions play in this process. Both two-year and four-year colleges must step in and flesh out institution- and major-specific articulation agreements, as they are best positioned to account for changes in programs, requirements and other regulations. In particular, such articulation agreements need to prioritize student diversity and issues of persistent inequities, rather than continuing the cycle of marginalization and implicit bias toward equitable transfer access and outcomes. Eventually, federal, state and institutional policies that prioritize explicit and concrete equity-oriented transfer goals, targets and measures would act toward fully realizing transfer and advance social mobility.

Opinion: Colleges Should Cultivate More Equitable Transfer Pathways (cont.)

An equity-minded culture that intentionally practices deep, honest reflection is required. Ultimately, none of the other changes I've recommended are possible without an equity-centered mind shift and purposeful reflection. This includes a full understanding of and action toward equity-mindedness, a transformative concept developed by Center for Urban Education director Estela Mara Bensimon. To become equity-minded, instructors and practitione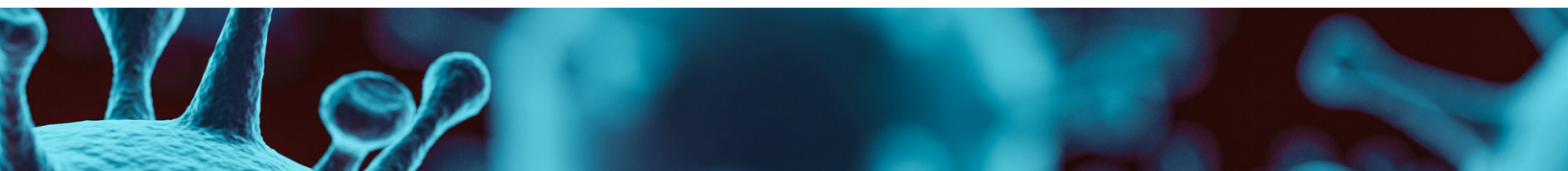rs hold themselves and their institutions responsible for enacting practices, policies and structures that address persistent inequities. The Office of Community College Research and Leadership, directed by Eboni Zamani-Gallaher, offers equity-guided resources that can help create inclusive teaching and learning environments.

If we are to truly achieve equitable transfer, in STEM and otherwise, it is up to us to take a holistic, thoughtful and critical approach to break down these systemic barriers, in higher education and society writ large. The fact that we, as educators, have been able to turn on a dime to at least try to adjust swiftly and responsibly in the wake of COVID-19 gives me hope that it's possible to make drastic and timely changes that remedy inequitable access and outcomes for minoritized students that had been sorely needed well before this pandemic. While we are in the process of weathering an unprecedented storm, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable students are not lost in this sea change. ◼

Read Original Article ▶▶ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/04/23/colleges-should-do-more-create-equitable-transfer-opportunities-students-opinion

Opinion: Retaining High-Risk Students Amid the Coronavirus

Higher education needs a national coalition to tackle two goals: keeping and recruiting students, especially those at risk, and building a digital infrastructure for the long haul, writes Peter McPherson.

By Peter McPherson // April 8, 2020

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/PEOPLEIMAGES

In recent times and particularly over the past five years, higher education has broadly coalesced around the shared goals of advancing equity and boosting degree completion as the sector works to better serve students and the public. The efforts of leading universities, associations, service providers and foundations have resulted in real progress in equity at some institutions and some improvement in degree completion nationally. Although the progress is measured across the sector, the local impact of this work is far more profound: more equitable outcomes and more graduates who go on to live fulfilling, civically engaged and prosperous lives. The stage was set for much more progress to come.

Yet the COVID-19 pandemic puts these hard-won gains in jeopardy. The students most in need of support — first generation, low income, those from underrepresented groups — are the very ones most at risk of dropping out or not enrolling. But the growing momentum around equity and completion in recent years illustrates the power of individual institutions and the collaborative work of associations, service providers and funders. That network holds immense capacity, and we need to mobilize it to address the challenges COVID-19 presents — and fast.

While we don't know how long this pandemic will last, its impact is already massive and growing by the day. Higher education faces a national challenge, and we need a national coalition to tackle it. This effort needs to center on two goals: keeping and recruiting students, especially those at risk, and building a digital infrastructure for the long haul.

Opinion: Retaining High-Risk Students Amid the Coronavirus (cont.)

We know students are experiencing new hurdles amid the pandemic. The challenges are particularly acute among low-income students, first-generation students and those from underrepresented groups. Research is clear that students who stop or drop out are likely to never return. That's why deeper engagement with students, through basic and more comprehensive advising, is so critical now.

We should also leverage the students who are closer to graduation. Through mentoring and tutoring, upperclassmen can provide essential learning assistance and keep other students engaged in their studies. This same outreach approach can be used to recruit new students, facilitating deep engagement immediately after admitting them. Institutions may also want to start working to identify innovative ways to engage new students once their studies start, even if it's remotely.

Faculty members have moved courses online with extraordinary speed, skill and grace given the circumstances. But to ensure students are effectively learning over a sustained period, we'll need a sustainable digital learning infrastructure. Thankfully, we already have a good idea from our experience in recent years of what that infrastructure should entail. Its key pillars include working with the faculty to strengthen online instruction, quickly expanding aggressive advising, curating courseware for large-enrollment courses and making them broadly available, and counseling institutions about digital engagement with their students.
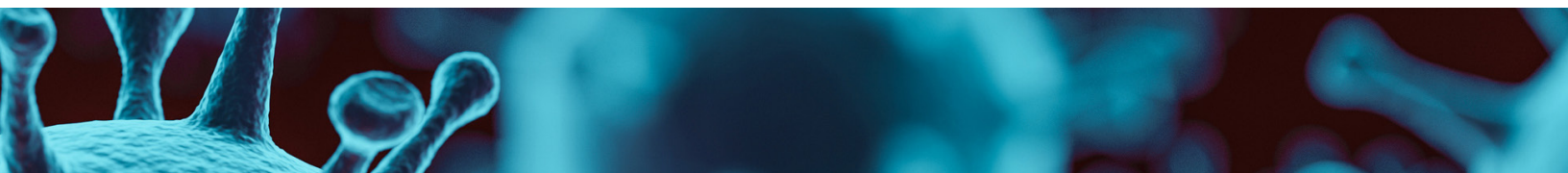
None of this will be easy; it's born out of necessity. But it's also an opportunity. Most colleges and universities are facing enormous financial shortfalls. Even if the higher education community is successful in making the case to Congress f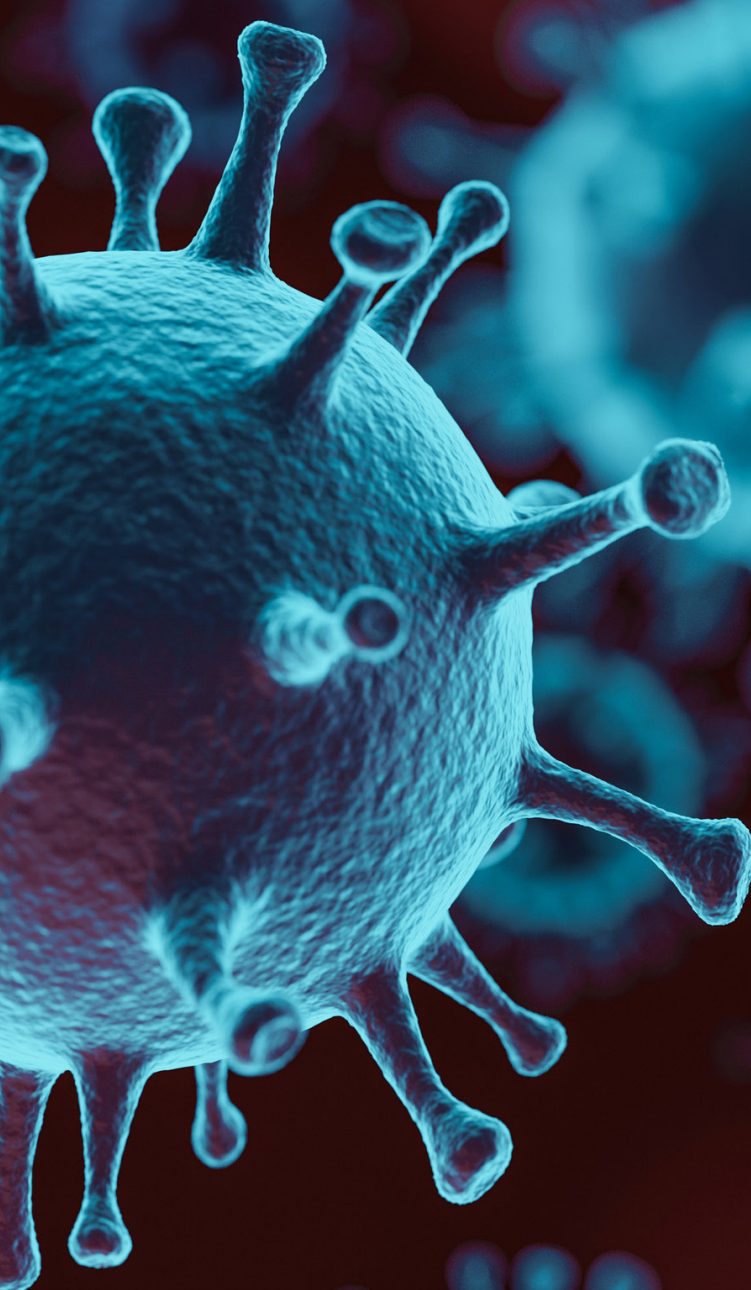or additional financial support, institutions will still be challenged. Even with these challenges, though, we have existing networks of institutions, systems, associations, service providers and key funders that are deeply committed to better serving students. Those networks, including APLU's Powered by Publics effort, provide essential infrastructure for universities to collaborate on a national scale. As a community, we can start to address this crisis by developing virtual convenings to establish shared goals and strategies. Universities, associations, funders and others will need to take the lead to move this work forward.

We face huge challenges that only a national coalition can tackle. But if we act quickly, thoughtfully and collectively, we can not only address the urgent needs of our students today, but also build a future that better serves more underserved students. Now is the time to roll up our sleeves and get to work. ■

Read Original Article ▶▶ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/04/08/higher-ed-needs-national-coalition-works-retain-risk-students-and-build-strong

CAMPUS CLOSURES

Key Takeaways:

- As campus closures strain low-income students, some started mutual aid networks to help each other cope.

- Many lower-income students were unable to leave closing campuses, often leaving them isolated.

- Seven tips for student affairs and academic support pros to best serve students who are no longer on campus.

'A Ghost Town'

Students have said too few were allowed to stay on campus. Far from the party atmosphere some observers may have feared, the students who remain say the experience is, if anything, isolating.

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

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/YINYANG

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 nonprofit 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 permitted 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,

'A Ghost Town' (cont.)

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 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 status 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 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

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> 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?
>
> *Anna Macknick, a junior studying linguistics at Princeton University*
> "

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

'A Ghost Town'

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." ■

Students Organize Their Own Aid Networks

As campus closures strain low-income students, undergrads at over a dozen universities have started large "mutual aid" networks and fundraisers to defray costs.

By Lilah Burke // March 17, 2020

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/MIXETTO

Last Thursday night, Noah French, a sophomore studying aerospace engineering at the University of Texas at Austin, couldn't sleep. The university had announced that day that operations were suspended to slow the spread of the new coronavirus.

"I was really anxious that whole day," he said. "Right now students don't know what the future holds. They don't know how they're going to be able to pay their rent, pay their utilities."

French had seen a spreadsheet made by students at Middlebury College circulating on Twitter. Middlebury had encouraged students early last week to leave the campus. The sheet was a way to coordinate "mutual aid," where students in need could post what would help them out and others who had money, storage space or free housing to offer could post their contact information.

The Middlebury sheet was full of entries.

"It just made me cry seeing it, because that showed to me that this was very real," French said.

That night he created a similar Google spreadsheet for UT Austin students to post the things they need or things they could help with.

Students at over a dozen universities have started similar spreadsheets, Facebook groups and resource documents. As more campuses close across the county, these resources continue to grow.

At the University of Virginia, the Student Council has led the effort. The council is currently matching donors to those in need and has raised over $10,000 in less than five days, said Isabella Liu, chair of the representative body.

"Student Council felt that it was very important for us to spring into action quickly and soften the blow of this move for the most vulnerable

and marginalized in the UVA community," Liu said.

While some of the networks allow anyone to peruse the posts, some have moderators that work to connect people.

That's the case at the University of Pittsburgh, which encouraged students to leave last week as well. A few students started a Google form people could fill out if they needed housing, transportation or storage space. The student organizers have been individually matching those in need with people who have volunteered to help.

Though the Pitt form started with about six student organizers, now about 20 to 30 people are helping out, said Neerja Garikipati, one of the students behind the original form.

"There's a lot of fear and uncertainty and just general panic and worry about what's going to happen next," she said. "Having a presence that has resources and you know you can rely upon to help you if you need it has been really good."

Low-income students who have been asked to move out of residence halls can struggle with the costs of moving, storage and transportation and may not have parents who can help or come get them. Some might be dealing with lost wages as more businesses and campuses are forced to shut down. Many universities have said they will

> " Right now students don't know what the future holds. They don't know how they're going to be able to pay their rent, pay their utilities.
>
> *Noah French, a sophomore studying aerospace engineering at the University of Texas at Austin* "

defray costs for students, but some level of need is still apparent.

The networks operate in different ways. At Wesleyan University, Jessi Russell decided to specify that the spreadsheet is for first-generation and low-income students.

Students looking for assistance are asked to rank their level of need so that those in the worst situations can be prioritized with the most money.

"This is where we expect students to be as honest as possible," they said. "Need is high at this time, and we're well aware of that."

The need scale runs from 1 to 5, with 5 being severe need. Students are not asked to prove their level of need in this time of chaos, Russell said.

The Wesleyan sheet, similarly to other mutual aid networks, has places for people to volunteer housing or transport, but the plan is really centered around monetary

donations. The GoFundMe account associated with the page raised over $45,000 in about a day. The goal is $950,000 to provide for over 200 high-need students in the short and long term. The funds will be transferred into an independent bank account and then distributed to first-generation, low-income students by check, Russell said.

"People have felt comfortable and I have felt honored in the way they've shared their stories," they said. "The hope that it's given people is big."

Garikipati, at Pitt, said the majority of offers she's seen have been for storage space. She said she understands that offering to house people you don't know might be hard for a lot of people, especially if you have roommates and especially with social distancing precautions from the government.

French, at UT Austin, said he was initially a little disappointed that people seemed incredibly

Students Organize Their Own Aid Networks (cont.)

eager to share his mutual aid sheet but less inclined to post on it. The university hasn't closed residence halls yet, which could be one factor, but also he said that sometimes a big university can feel isolating to people.

"As large as our university is, there is a lot of isolation and a lot of fear about how an individual might play a role in the community," he said.

"There's a lot of fear about how to help others because I think we're taught to be closed off and stay in our comfort zones."

But he said he hopes more people are inspired to give and be honest about what they need.

"There's a lot of shame and guilt harbored in those people who know that they need something but have been told their whole life not to ask for it," French said. "As long as it was able to help one person, it was worth it." ■

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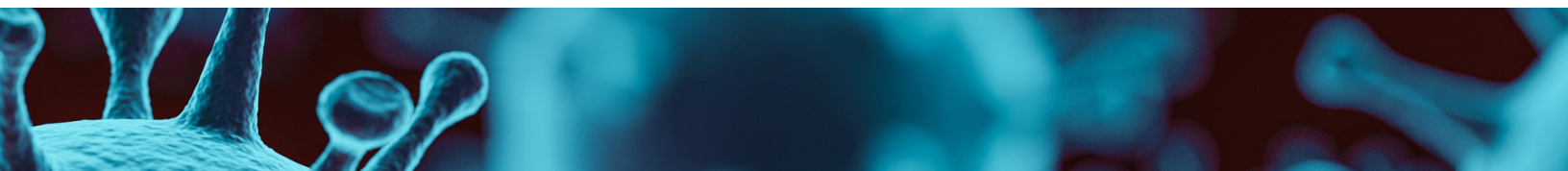
Opinion: Fostering Student Success Outside of Online Classes

How can student affairs and academic support staff best serve students who are mostly no longer on campus? Jeff Doyle provides seven recommendations.

By Jeff Doyle // April 7, 2020

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/SERGEYPETERMAN

I've worked in student affairs for almost 30 years and have learned to clearly articulate the benefits of student life to many students, faculty members and parents. The argument is really quite simple: a student only spends about 15 hours a week in class and another 15 hours a week studying. Allowing time for sleeping and getting ready in the morning, that leaves about 80 waking hours a week when a student is neither in class nor studying for one.

That's the equivalent of two 40-hour workweeks within one week. And that time is when most student affairs and academic support staff attempt to make a meaningful impact through living-learning experiences, student organization involvement, intramurals and fitness classes, tutoring, career advising, mentoring, volunteering, and the like. For decades, student affairs staff like me have argued that we can have just as much, if not more, of an impact on students.

But the COVID-19 outbreak, the closing of many campuses and the move to online classes potentially nullify the impact thousands of student affairs and academic support staff across the nation can have. And the question worth asking is "What does student affairs and academic support look like when most students are no longer on campuses?"

Thankfully, many student affairs and academic support staff are quickly learning how to deliver and scale their services in a virtual manner. And now is an excellent time to rethink how students are educated outside the classroom in an online environment. How can we best reallocate our student affairs staff to roles that foster student success in online learning environments?

Here are seven actions we might consider in the coming weeks.

Fostering Student Success Outside of Online Classes (cont.)

No. 1: Use our learning management system's data on students as an early alert. If you are in student affairs or other types of student services, find someone at your university who has reporting access to the learning management system. Work with them to run a report to see which students have not engaged on the system for over a week. Come up with a plan for reaching out to those students or their faculty members so as to understand their situation and nudge their online engagement. Baylor started doing this last week, and we are finding ways of helping our students navigate the technological, mental and emotional hurdles keeping them from engaging in their online classes.

Champlain College has gone a step further, according to EAB. It identified "students most in need of academic intervention by highlighting 'risk phrases' in students' online discussion board posts. The institution developed a list of frequently used key words and phrases that signal academic risk, (e.g., help!, tried over and over, frustrated, don't understand). An automatic script identifies all instances of the words in posts, and instructors are provided a prioritized list of students to proactively contact."

You can also use your institution's LMS is to build a predictive model using the data commonly associated with lack of retention. Many institutions already use predictive models for retention, but few that I am aware of integrate data from the LMS. In the words of EAB: "Progressive institutions are developing algorithms to predict the risk of attrition using historical records, demographic data, and LMS usage metrics … Data gleaned from enrollment and admissions information can be paired with in-course activity data, including the number of log-ins and page views, number and length of online postings, minutes spent on the course website, and attempts at practice quizzes or other formative assessments embedded in the online course environment."

No. 2: Collect feedback on their success as online students. One of the challenges most student affairs and academic support staff have is that we can only provide help to the students who seek it. Many more students don't know how to ask for help or don't feel comfortable asking for it. What if the university was able to reach these students in order to learn about their challenges and support them?

A number of institutions employ brief surveys at the start of the semester that give student affairs and academic support staff a pulse on the students. For example, at Baylor University, we learned through such a process that students were about five times more likely to leave the institution if they responded by "disagreeing" (vs. agreeing) with this question:

"Do you feel like you belong at Baylor?" We also learned that attendance at orientation and welcome events were key factors in student retention, along with not skipping classes and arriving to class on time.

At the end of March, Baylor sent out a short survey for students that is being used to guide our outreach to them. The questions were a mix of multiple choice and a few open-ended options. Several of these questions included, among others:

- How would you describe your overall well-being since Baylor moved to online classes?

- If you are not doing as well or struggling, what are the main reason(s) you are not doing as well or struggling?

- Is there anything limiting your ability to participate in your Baylor online learning? Which sources of information from the university have been most helpful in keeping you up-to-date on changes as a result of COVID-19?

- How would you evaluate your professors' efforts on what may have been their first week teaching online?

- What do you think Baylor needs to know about Baylor students like you at this time?

In the first 12 hours, we received over 3,000 responses, and with reminders, we heard from more

than 6,500 — or almost half of all of our undergraduates.

And we've learned a lot from their answers. Administrators in various departments have reached out to students experiencing technological challenges, those concerned with issues in their specific classes, those needing financial assistance and those who have self-reported mental health difficulties. We've also created a dashboard and circulated it among university leaders to offer a quick glance at the state of Baylor students. For example, we know that 20 percent of students are struggling with online learning, although more than half of those who replied to the survey are either surprisingly or extremely impressed with Baylor faculty's adjustment to teaching online. We also have learned that student respondents also prefer communication in the form of a weekly email from the president.

No. 3: Implement a coaching program. Coaching programs are one of the fastest-growing student support initiatives of the past decade, and multiple research studies show the effectiveness of such programs. One reason they are thriving is that they are student centered versus university centered: you can direct each student to various specialized departments to help them with their distinct needs and guide them to the best resources. Virtual meetings with students

might include conversations about academic behaviors, financial matters, social integration, personal struggles, career guidance, self-care or setting priorities.

Baylor is rolling out a Bear Care Coaching program this week, having spent countless hours the previous two weeks planning for it. Several hundred university staff have volunteered to serve as coaches and have watched several short videos made by existing staff about how to coach, how to log comments in a database and how to connect students to other campus resources. The coaches are now contacting the students in our survey who evaluated themselves as struggling or who expressed a desire for someone to reach out to them.

No. 4: Create staff-initiated student conversations among themselves. The current online educational delivery model at most colleges and universities is centered on course delivery. But students will still want to communicate with each other outside of class time. As former Tulane president Scott Cowen noted in a recent article about how his university responded to Hurricane Katrina, "Institutions should also ensure that groups within the larger campus community — such as individual programs, clubs, and student organizations — remain in close dialogue and find ways to still pursue their interests and plans."

Ask yourself, "What mechanisms exist that help student affairs and academic support staff to gather students together to talk about how they are doing?"

Most learning management systems allow for noncredit groups to use the course platform, and many colleges and universities have purchased web-conferencing software like WebEx or Zoom that can work within their LMS to allow students to communicate with each other. You could also work with your institution's IT staff to use existing labels in the enterprise resource planning system to put the members of various student organizations in "courses" for ease of communication. Many students use group text messaging for this, but the LMS functionality, with staff guidance, may strengthen the connections among students not included in group text chats.

One successful similar idea is Oregon State's Ecampus Learning Community, which gives students in shared majors the opportunity to connect to each other and their adviser. Another option: some universities have purchased student organization platforms, like CollegiateLink and OrgSync, that allow students to communicate with one another.

At Baylor, the student affairs staff creates a Facebook group for each entering class before they arrive on the campus. Unprompted, students interact and engage with

each other, asking who is going to live where on the campus, who is taking what classes and so on. Often, students who meet each other on these Facebook groups have even decided they wanted to room together in the fall. You could create a similar-type social media group for current students geographically separated by COVID-19 campus closures, allowing them to talk to and support each other. The staff overseeing the group would only interject if a question came up that no students could answer.

No. 5: Interact with students outside 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. As a former residence hall director, I always found it fascinating to see how, at 5 p.m., students emerged from their dorms and turned the campus in to their playground while almost every nonstudent left. What message did that send to the students about faculty and staff's willingness to help?

In the COVID-19 era, physical campus-based institutions need to take every possible step to engage, encourage and equip students for success. If student affairs staff work from home and potentially have some daytime interruptions like children, pets and household work, they might also consider an expectation that to best serve students they might need to be available and willing to help later in the evening and on weekends. For example, Wayne D'Orio writes in a piece on rethinking student services for

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> How can we re-envision our work to re-engage with our new online learners so that they continue to know they are a part of a community that cares about their success?

"

online education, "Take Sunday evening, which for most colleges is a time when many of their support services are unavailable, waiting to reopen on Monday morning. For a student juggling a job and a family, however, Sunday evening can be a prime time to do schoolwork."

I am not saying people must work outside traditional work hours, nor am I saying that there should not be a balance between work and a personal life. Not everyone, every day, has to work nontraditional hours. But colleges that do provide availability and outreach outside traditional work hours are most likely to be successful in serving students effectively and staying competitive in a rapidly changing educational environment.

No. 6: Focus on students most at risk for dropping out. Many universities already know what groups of students will be less likely to stay in college and graduate. At many traditional campuses, where 18- to 22-year-old white students make up the

majority of students, these groups might include first-generation students, underrepresented minorities, older students who are parents and many others. Unfortunately, the structural and cultural bias towards more traditional students at many higher education institutions can make it difficult for many underrepresented students to succeed.

Student affairs and academic support staff could identify and reach out to students who fall in one or more of the groups that are particularly less likely to remain and graduate. The challenge with this approach is that it can be seen as stereotyping a group of people without knowing them individually. But I would argue that the university is reaching out to students whose success we want to make a priority. By using some open-ended questions like those in the previous survey, we might open the door to further dialogue. Baylor has decided to act on this idea by reaching out to students who are graduating in May, those who

Fostering Student Success Outside of Online Classes (cont.)

studied abroad this spring, those with low GPAs and those who had received more than one early alert this semester.

No. 7: Hold office hours. Before COVID-19, students typically could come by our offices and/or schedule meetings with us. This can continue — virtually. We can decide how to best reach out to the students and let them know what times we are available each day and week. We can use vario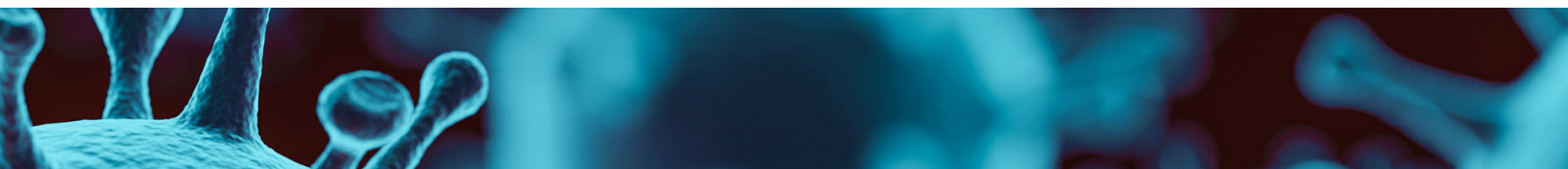us software to create the schedule and host office hours, including WebEx, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Duo or Google Hangouts.
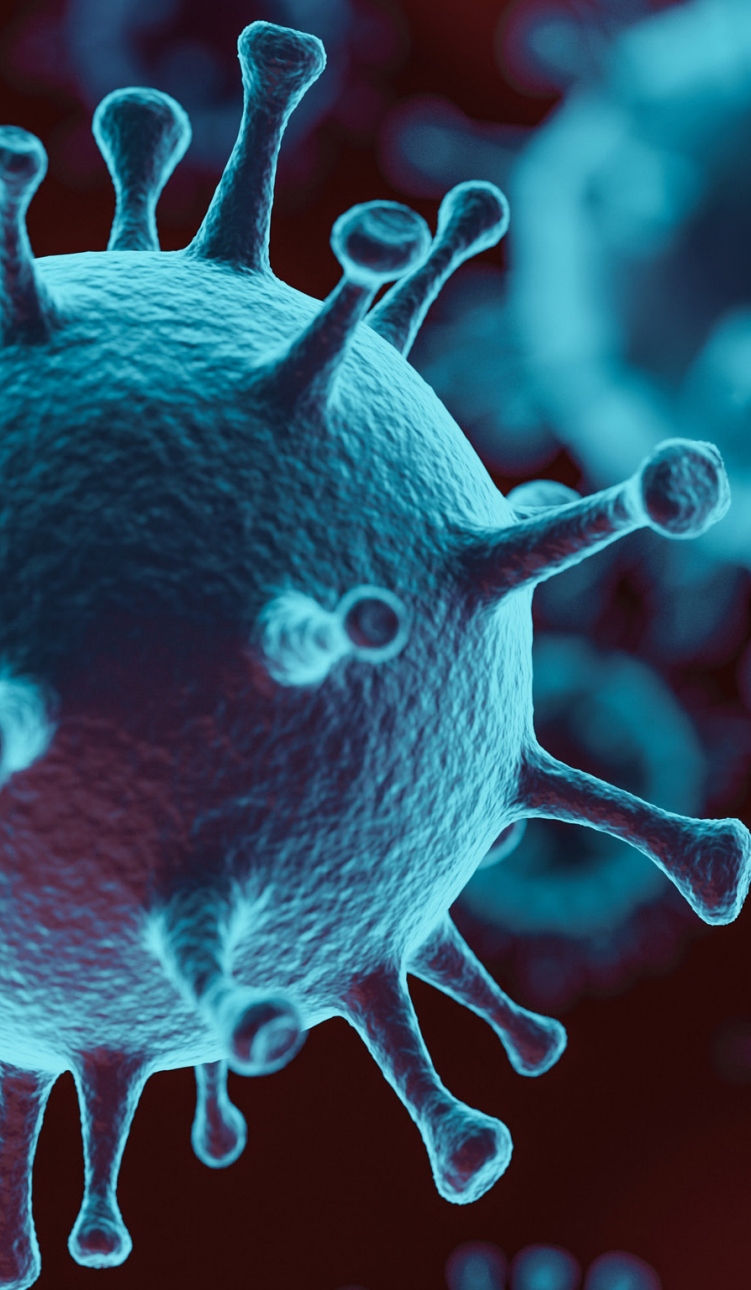
The week before Baylor restarted classes online, the IT and library staff hosted office hours each day for professors going online. There were designated time slots for: 1) help with the LMS, 2) web conferencing, 3) media services and 4) instructional design. What if student affairs and academic support services did something similar with office hours for: 1) class help, 2) personal help, 3) social support, 4) financial questions, 5) library use and 6) spiritual care? In conclusion, now is the time for student affairs and academic support professionals to get out of our comfort zones and try something different. How can we re-envision our work to re-engage with our new online learners so that they continue to know they are a part of a community that cares about their success? What do we want our students to say about their college experience during COVID-19 and how we impacted their lives outside their classes? ∎

Read Original Article ▶▶

https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/04/07/whats-role-student-affairs-and-academic-support-staff-when-most-students-arent

AID AND FINANCES

Key Takeaways:

- Colleges have struggled to distribute emergency aid dollars to help students with housing, food insecurity and internet service.

- The Education Department said institutions could continue paying students for lost Federal Work-Study jobs, but some colleges did not.

Colleges Scramble to Administer Emergency Aid

The coronavirus pandemic has left thousands of students in need of financial assistance. The race to meet that need has been slowed by red tape and insufficient funding.

By **Emma Whitford** // **May 11, 2020**

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/HAILSHADOW

In early April, the Mission Asset Fund launched the California College Student Emergency Support Fund, which offered $2.3 million to low-income, undocumented or otherwise in-need California college students in the form of $500 grants.

"Within the first 10 minutes, the system crashed," said Audrey Dow, senior vice president at the Campaign for College Opportunity, one of several organizations promoting the private fund. One thousand students applied in the first 90 minutes. A day later, Mission Asset Fund, a nonprofit organization, had put 65,000 students on a wait list. *(This paragraph has been updated to note the relationship of the Campaign for College Opportunity to the fund.)*

The coronavirus pandemic has shed light on existing disparities in student wealth and security. Campus shutdowns sparked conversations about students' housing security. As unemployment skyrockets, the number of food-insecure students grows. Online learning revealed that many students don't have access to computers and reliable internet. Colleges are scrambling to meet the needs of their students remotely, and to do it fast.

But distributing aid dollars can be harder than it seems.

"The fact is, to give somebody emergency aid is actually pretty difficult," said Sara Goldrick-Rab, a professor of higher education and sociology at Temple University in Philadelphia and founding director of the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice, a research and advocacy organization that focuses on students' basic needs.

In the weeks following campus closures, an avalanche of student aid fund announcements piled up. Seemingly every college wanted to get something to their

Colleges Scramble to Administer Emergency Aid (cont.)

students — a laptop, Wi-Fi, money for food and housing. That's great, Goldrick-Rab said, but the success of such programs hinges on their ability to reach all students, process requests and administer aid quickly.

Outreach is critical. An email is not enough, Goldrick-Rab said. She highlighted the University of California, Berkeley, which immediately advertised its aid program on social media and its website. The university has turned more than $900,000 of private gifts and other funding into emergency grants to date, in addition to $9.6 million in funding from the federal stimulus package, the CARES Act.

The stimulus package allocated $14 billion for higher education, half of which was specifically routed to institutions so that they could provide emergency grants to students. Colleges and universities were tasked with deciding how to distribute the grants to students.

Applications for aid, while informative for colleges, are a hurdle to students seeking funding for immediate needs like food, housing and internet service.

"There's so many bad applications out there that basically ask students to write essays about their poverty," Goldrick-Rab said. "They basically make them perform their poverty, traumatizing them, or they ask them questions in a way that nobody who is seriously stressed out could answer."

Keith Curry, president of Compton College in California, shares the frustration with applications. "We ask students over and over again, 'How poor are you' on every application," he said.

When it comes to choosing which students will receive the limited aid funds, experts emphasized two things: prioritize and randomize. Prioritize the different needs students have, and then randomize the recipients within those groups.

"Randomizing is what the colleges are not doing. It's awful, but it's also a fact. It's the only way to get the job done," Goldrick-Rab said. "Let go of the idea that you're going to make perfect decisions — you're not. There's no such thing."

For a while, Montgomery College was doing just that. The Maryland community college was processing aid requests without an application for whichever students requested aid.

"We were really trying hard to have it not be bureaucratic," said Joyce Matthews, vice president of development and alumni relations at the college and executive director of the Montgomery College Foundation. The goal was to evaluate need for individual cases. (This paragraph has been updated to clarify Matthews' statement.)

"But the numbers just grew too quickly," Matthews said.

The college has since implemented a short application, which asks students what their areas of need are and to list someone in the college community, like a faculty member or employee, who can advocate for them.

"We knew we were going to have to use professional judgment" to determine whom to send aid to, Matthews said.

So far, Montgomery has distributed $625,000 in aid, apart from CARES Act dollars, averaging $529 per award.

Need has not slowed, Matthews said. Just last week, the college received 200 requests.

"We're starting to see second requests," she said. "Certainly, the food-insecurity issue does not go away."

Some colleges are using existing financial need data to determine which students receive how much aid. Georgia State University, for example, uses existing estimated financial contribution data to determine the amount of the award, with the students with greatest need receiving the most in grants. The university has already administered CARES Act funds to 23,000 students, plus an additional 2,000 grants, totaling $800,000 from a combination of

Colleges Scramble to Administer Emergency Aid (cont.)

philanthropic gifts and CARES dollars.

But prior financial need data is outdated because many students' financial situation has changed suddenly amid the pandemic.

Curry has laid out a swath of programs for his students at Compton College. He's delivering meals and groceries to students through partnerships with Everytable and Grubhub. He's also mailing laptops and mobile hotspots to students. This was before the college received its CARES Act dollars.

His biggest hurdle has been maintaining funding.

"I'm trying to scale up," he said. "For example, our food program: I'm at 150 students, but I'm trying to increase that. But I need more money."

Traditional college-aged students are not the only group affected by campus closures.

Gilbert Vasquez is 57 and works with formerly incarcerated students at East Los Angeles College, a community college. The shift to online learning has been difficult for his students. Many of them work part-time and are in their 40s and 50s. They didn't grow up with technology the way many traditional college students have, and they are adapting to life as students after spending years in prison.

Vasquez is worried some of his students may drop out.

"It was going fantastic, it was going great," he said. "And then COVID hit and just slammed the door on us." Vasquez is working to get laptops and mobile hotspots to students that need them, and to facilitate Zoom meetings and set students up with tutors.

He's worried about his own education, too. Vasquez spent nine years in prison before pursuing a certificate in the addiction studies program at East Los Angeles College. He's currently working on a bachelor's degree in psychology and planning to graduate in 2021.

"But this right here sets everything back," he said. ■

Read Original Article ▶▶ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/11/limited-funds-colleges-are-rushing-get-emergency-aid-students-hands

Work-Study Pay Loss

Students at some institutions have lost much-needed income from work-study jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic.

By Greta Anderson // May 6, 2020

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/AEROFOKUS011

After the Pratt Institute in New York City closed its campus in March due to the coronavirus pandemic, Emlyn Orr said she received an email from her supervisor at her Federal Work-Study job telling her not to report to her shifts as a photography dark room attendant.

The email didn't make clear whether Orr would continue receiving pay, but said students facing financial difficulty as a result of such work stoppages should contact the college's financial aid office. Orr, a junior, said she waited on payment — her student account still shows an unpaid balance of $3,811 — that never came. She relied on the $165 biweekly pay

to buy meals and supplies for her classes, which are being held remotely. She's now wonders where that money has gone.

"It feels kind of wrong to ask for money from anyone, but at the same time, this money was supposed to be budgeted," Orr said. "Where is it?"

Federal Work-Study is a financial aid program funded and administered by the U.S. Department of Education, which provides about $1 billion in funding to help colleges provide students with paid jobs. It is designed to help needy students pay for costs associated with

attending college. The program requires institutions to match up to 50 percent of the department's allotment in most cases, according to department officials.

The department has said colleges can continue to use federal funds to pay students who had work-study jobs before the pandemic, even if campus closures are preventing them from performing those jobs, said Megan Coval, vice president of policy and federal relations for the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, or NASFAA.

These are "optional provisions," and colleges and universities are

following them in various ways, whether that's paying student employees for the time they would have worked or providing partial payments or telework options, Bridget Schwartz, president of the National Student Employment Association, said in an email.

The University of Wisconsin at Madison, for example, said it will continue to pay students, even if they are no longer working in the jobs, the remaining amount of their work-study allotment through May 23, according to a message on the university's website.

Students with work-study jobs have unmet financial needs to cover expenses associated with attending college, and some are recipients of federal Pell Grants, which is an indicator of low-income status, Coval said. Of the nearly 3,000 institutions in NASFAA's membership, many were "pleased" to learn the Education Department would allow them to continue paying these students with federal funds, she said.

"That was one of the first questions that we were getting from our members — can we keep paying these students," Coval said.

But some institutions, such as Boston College, have determined only student employees approved by their supervisors to continue working will be paid, according to a university coronavirus information

> " It feels kind of wrong to ask for money from anyone, but at the same time, this money was supposed to be budgeted. Where is it?
>
> *Emlyn Orr, a student at the Pratt Institute*
> "

page. A junior who had a work-study job as an administrative assistant at Boston College said she had to assume she would not be paid through the rest of the year when her paycheck didn't come and she didn't hear from the university or her supervisor about working remotely.

The student reached out to her financial aid adviser, who informed her that the college had depleted its federal funds allotted for work-study and decided not to use its own funds to pay students who weren't actually working. She said Boston College isn't prioritizing work-study students, many of whom are in "dire situations," even though the Education Department has made it an option for colleges to do so.

"Every school is going to face such a loss," said the student, who asked to remain anonymous. "But I know that if they prioritized it, they could maybe find a way to afford it."

John Mahoney, vice provost for enrollment management, said Boston College simply could not afford to keep paying students who aren't working remotely. He said the university usually uses its own funds to continue paying students once federal work-study funds are depleted around February or March. But the university now has a budget shortfall after refunding $25 million for room and board fees paid by students evacuated from campus as a result of the pandemic.

"This will be the first year since 1972 that we won't have a balanced budget here at BC," Mahoney said. "We simply did not have the funds in the budget to continue paying students that were not able to continue their jobs."

Jolene Travis, executive director of public relations for Pratt, said in an email that the institute had also depleted its work-study funds from the government and would pay students remaining on the institute's payroll with institutional

Work-Study Pay Loss (cont.)

funds. But for students who worked in labs on campus, such as Orr, their work could not be continued remotely and would not be paid, Travis said.

"Departments were encouraged to identify work that students could accomplish remotely in order for Pratt to keep as many students employed as possible," Travis said. "Unfortunately, some work couldn't be transitioned."

Travis noted that affected students were provided with emergency financial assistance based on individual circumstances. For example, Orr received a $500 emergency grant, which she said she "appreciated" but doesn't make up for the balance of the pay she will not be getting.

Mahoney said Boston College has also focused its institutional funds on emergency support for students who request help and demonstrate high need, including Pell recipients, who make up 14 percent of the university's undergraduate population.

The Boston College junior no longer receiving her FWS pay said her financial situation is better than many others' on campus — both of her parents are still working and help pay her tuition — but she is concerned for the FWS students who live off of their salaries. She said the university didn't effectively communicate with students about what would

happen to FWS jobs, which Mahoney called a "fair criticism."

"It's been difficult. The transparency would've been the best thing to have received during this time," the student said. "To act like a large number of their students aren't impacted by this, hundreds on campus, it's been misaligned with their values."

While emergency federal funds are being provided to colleges through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security, or CARES Act, they may only be used for student expenses related to college closures, such as plane tickets to travel home or technology to access remote education, Coval said. She said paying students wages they would've earned for the remainder of the semester is not considered a coronavirus-related expense. "Even if the school wanted to do that with student funds, they would not be able to," Coval said. "If they have a student who comes and says, 'I can't make my tuition payment because me or my parent lost their job,' that's maybe the result of the coronavirus, but not campus disruption."

She also noted that the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund created by the legislation is disruption-based, not necessarily need-based.

Still, the Education Department acknowledged in guidance it

published March 5 that the financial impact of losing a work-study job "can be devastating" to students, especially if their colleges are conducting online instruction and students must continue to make tuition payments. For this reason, institutions "may continue" to pay FWS student employees "under certain limited circumstances," including students whose place of employment has been shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic, the guidance said.

Institutions are only eligible for this provision if they continue to pay faculty and staff members and meet their "institutional wage share requirement," which is the portion of work-study employee salaries paid for by colleges. Institutions with budget shortfalls that have laid off nonstudent employees would be ineligible based on the department's guidance, Coval said.

Institutions project annually how many students can be awarded FWS funds from the agency to make the allotment last, and colleges and universities themselves also have to provide a portion of the pay to student employees, Schwartz, of the National Student Employment Association, said. FWS funding is typically split between these two sources, but if a college depleted its FWS allotment before the coronavirus pandemic, as Boston College did, payment for FWS students would come entirely

Work-Study Pay Loss (cont.)

from institutional dollars for the remainder of their employment, Coval said.

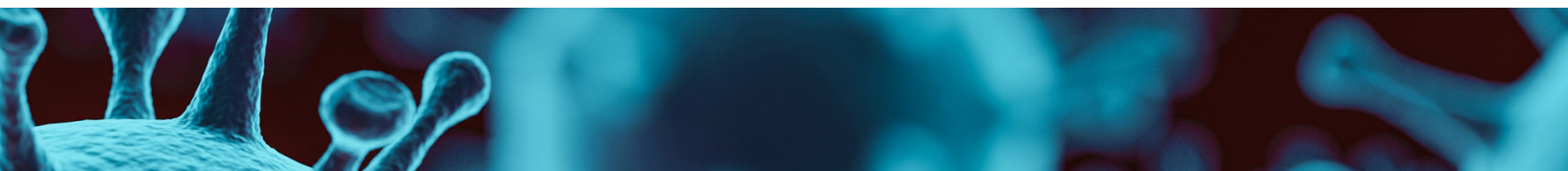Schwartz called it a "delicate balancing act" for institutions to employ as many students as possible through the program but not exceed the allotment.
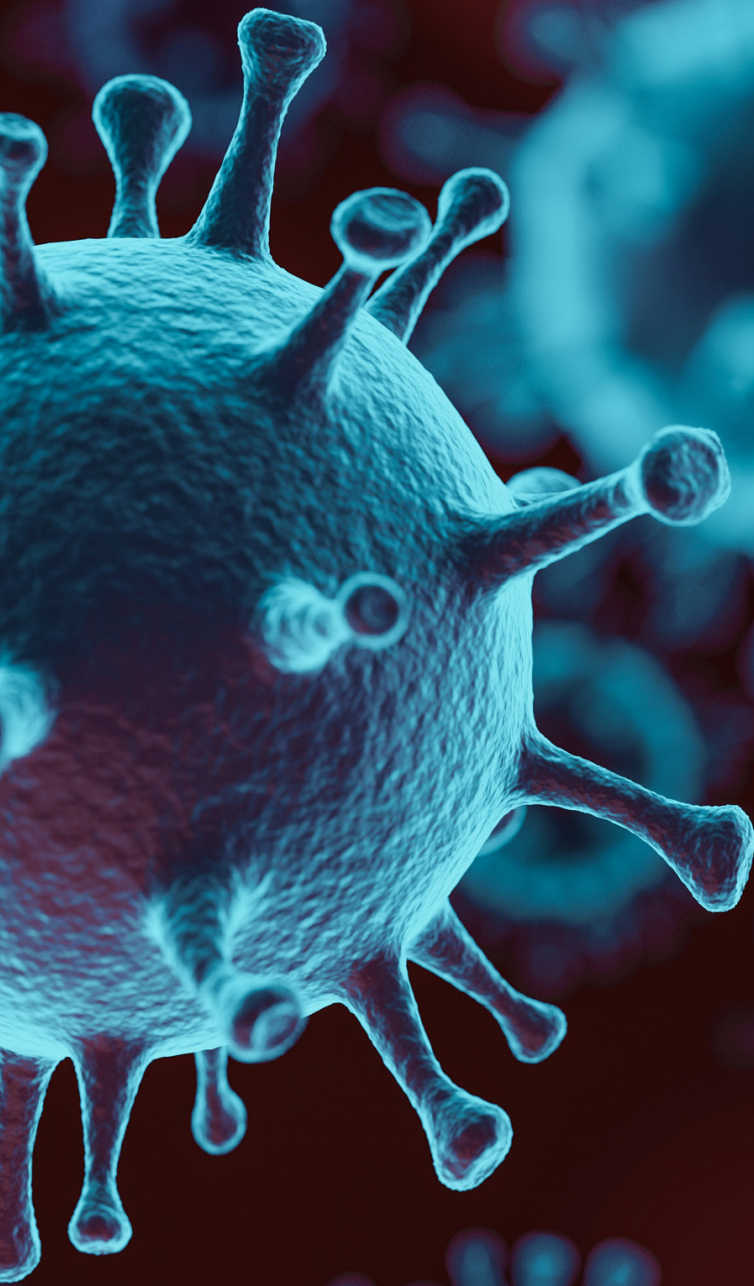
"If schools exhaust their total allotment or students reach their award limit, the school would then have to pay all of the student's earnings if the student was to continue working," Schwartz said. "While students are usually not aware of these behind-the-scenes funding sources, there is a cost to the college or university to employ FWS students." ∎

Read Original Article ▶ ▶   https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/06/federal-work-study-students-paid-discretion-colleges

REMOTE INSTRUCTION

Key Takeaways:

- Students with anxiety disorders, autism and other disabilities struggle with disruption of their normal routines after the move to remote education.

- As many lower-income students struggle with internet access, some colleges boost Wi-Fi in their parking lots.

- A promising course delivery model, HyFlex, gives students a choice to attend either in person or online.

- Faculty members should help students with financial, health and safety concerns, as well as their overall well-being.

- Students' complicated home lives can make synchronous online courses far more difficult to navigate than their in-person equivalents.

How Neurodivergent Students Are Getting Through the Pandemic

Students with anxiety disorders, autism and other disabilities are struggling with the disruption of their normal routines after the move to remote education.

By **Madeline St. Amour** // **May 13, 2020**

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/DIEGO_CERVO

Amber Nicole Wolfe had settled into a daily routine that worked well for her. She would go to her classes in American Sign Language at Pikes Peak Community College in Colorado, then go to the American Sign Language lab to do her work. Then she would go home and relax.

The coronavirus pandemic has changed her routine, and most everyone's, for several months. And it doesn't look like things will go back to normal any time soon.

But for some students, routines are important. Wolfe has autism, and she relies on her routines to help manage some of the issues that come along with that. She has executive function issues, which means it's hard for her to get started on a task, and difficulties absorbing texts, which means relying on only one method of learning with just written instructions has been a struggle.

"I don't want to lose my momentum for school, because I moved here for this program," Wolfe said. "But it is going to be very hard [in the fall] and I'm going to have to create new routines for myself. Right now I created a makeshift routine, but I don't like it."

Many students are working through issues and disabilities that are not very apparent. Some are neurodivergent, like Wolfe, and have to work harder to adjust to new situations and stressors.

"Neurodiversity is a paradigm that acknowledges and accepts different ways of thinking and acting. It's a diversity and inclusion perspective applied to autism, ADHD, learning disabilities and other invisible disabilities," said Solvegi Shmulsky, a professor and director of the Center for Neurodiversity at Landmark College, a Vermont institution that specializes in serving students with learning disabilities. "For my students, autism, ADHD or dyslexia is often part of who they are, and

they say they want to be accepted, not fixed."

When her students went online, they worried they would lose the support they needed, Shmulsky said. Since the switch, many of her students have reported activation — or executive function — issues.

"If you're in your house, you don't have the structure from your peers," she said. "And not everyone's home is the kind of place that is going to be conducive for them to work on their studies."

Another issue she's heard about is how difficult it can be to understand complex concepts on a video call. It's harder for faculty to tell when students are having trouble in a virtual setting, as well.

This can all be upsetting emotionally, she said. Students who are neurodivergent learned how to deal with difficulties, like how they best study and how to advocate for themselves. Now all of their strategies have been shaken up.

Pros and Cons of Online Learning
Steven Vitt, a senior at Landmark College, has attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and nonverbal learning disorder, or NVLD. He wasn't prepared for how much remote learning was going to impact him, he said.

"It's a lot more difficult to stay in a routine. I had my routine and my days scheduled pretty well when I was on campus," Vitt said. "There was a lot of going to different parts of campus to do work, and now it's a lot of sitting in the same place, looking at a computer."

It's more difficult to stay accountable in that setting, he said.

To deal with the stress, he's been turning to connections he made at college.

"One thing I think is important for neurodivergent students, of all ages, is to just remember in times like this when you feel really isolated, there's a lot of people out there who recognize the challenges that you're facing and how valid that is," he said. "That's one thing I've seen for friends I have at Landmark. It's really important for us to connect with each other and have that support in knowing that we're not alone in trying to finish up the semester and getting work done."

That's one way colleges can support neurodivergent students through this pandemic, Shmulsky said. She's heard from several students who say it's important to be with similar people. Online support groups for students who have autism or ADHD can be critical to lifting up students' spirits.

For some neurodivergent students, online learning is superior to its face-to-face counterpart.

"I definitely prefer online classes. You get to control the environment," said Emma Irvine, a junior at the online Western Governors University who previously earned an associate degree at a brick-and-mortar institution. "In a class you're surrounded by a bunch of people, and there could be distractions going on. When you're online, you get to choose where you learn and where you study, and you don't have to worry about getting to class on time."

Irvine has ADHD as well as fibromyalgia, a condition that causes pain all over the body. She's glad to be at an online institution because she has more time to get things done and more flexibility for her disabilities, she said.

She has experienced a fair amount of issues due to the pandemic, though. Her fibromyalgia symptoms have flared up in recent weeks due to stress.

If someone touches her on the back, for example, she'll feel a lot of pain. And her disorder also causes memory issues.

"With fibromyalgia, I will forget certain words," she said. "I forgot the word 'medication' today."

Concerns for Support and Retention
To help these students succeed online, faculty can use universal design when setting up courses,

Shmulsky said. Institutions can make sure students have access to text readers and keep up online support for tutoring and reading assistance.

At Landmark, Vitt and other students said access to advisers and faculty had helped ease the stress from the transition. He meets with Shmulsky, his adviser, nearly every day to plan out his tasks and talk through problems.

There is some concern that the quick move to remote learning will let supportive infrastructure at institutions slide, said Meg Grigal, co-director of Think College at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts at Boston.

"Right now colleges are still in that place where they don't know what to expect," she said. "I think they're doing their best, but it's also going to be incumbent upon students to ensure that, if their needs aren't being met, it's documented and shared. It's harder to hold people accountable when no one's in the same space."

Retention and enrollment for students with hidden disabilities will be another problem, Grigal said.

"Thinking about going to college is hard enough for a young person," she said. If students also need certain supports but can't visit colleges to see what they have, it could make them change their mind about enrolling.

Because many students, not just those who need extra support, are reconsidering enrollment, colleges are facing unprecedented financial challenges, she said. So there will be fewer funds for the resources and support neurodivergent and other students need.

"There are so many challenges to college access … It's already a very heavy lift" for neurodivergent students and those with disabilities, Grigal said. "Adding this additional piece of, you're going to do all that work but not be on a campus — it could be hard to see that as a good use of their time." ∎

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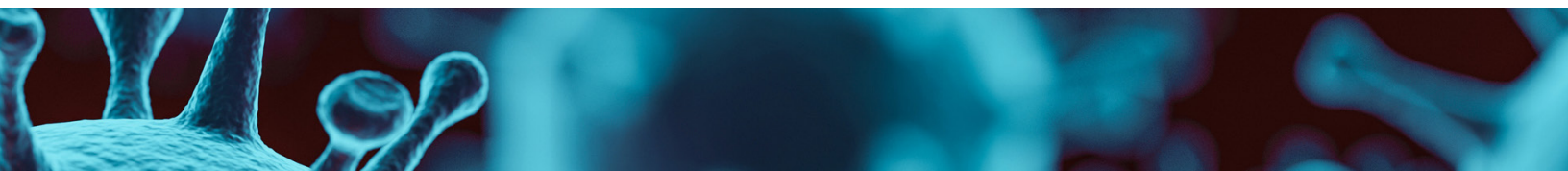
Reserved: Internet Parking

Using Wi-Fi-ready college parking lots is now a way of life for students with limited or no internet access.

By **Colleen Flaherty** // **May 8, 2020**

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/NOSYSTEM IMAGES

Savanna Navarro Kresse, a senior history major at Washington State University, Tri-Cities, participated in a local Facebook Live broadcast this week about higher education during COVID-19. Her smart answers and calm demeanor masked her discomfort: she was answering questions from her car, parked in a campus lot, with the sun overhead. She badly wanted to turn on her air-conditioning, but she needed to keep ambient noise to a minimum.

Kresse dealt with the conditions, as she does often. Since COVID-19 hit, she's spent two or three hours per week in the same parking lot, doing classwork or taking tests online. Studying in her car is hardly ideal, but this is the only place she can access reliable Wi-Fi.

"It can be a little weird taking a test in your car," she said. "Looking at your books or notes while holding your laptop on your lap can be awkward, too. It can be worse when your tests have a time limit and you're trying to hurry and look through notes."

Academe has more than risen to the challenges posed by the rapid transition to remote instruction. But the entire shift was predicated on the notion that all students have access not only to a computer, but to reliable internet access. In reality, many do not.

While some students report finishing up the semester with only their phones, many institutions have done their best to loan laptops to computerless students who would otherwise be working in on-campus computer labs. The internet access problem is more complicated, however.

Some students, especially in rural areas, have no broadband internet availability. Others have generally spotty Wi-Fi or experience router overload when multiple devices are working at once within a home. Data plans get maxed out, too.

That's just connectivity. The other issue is affordability, or

whether or not students can pay for internet access where it's available. Many can't.

All these concerns existed prior to COVID-19. But the pandemic has exposed them and exacerbated them in ways that may only widen documented achievement gaps.

Karen Stout, president of Achieving the Dream, a nonprofit working to ensure community college student success, said that these inequities are why community colleges were some of the last institutions to move to all-remote instruction.

"We knew we were putting some students at risk," she said. "We know that many community colleges students use our libraries to do their distance learning courses, for instance, taking courses online but using our libraries to do so."

Stout said that the need is most acute among students at rural and tribal colleges.

When going remote became inevitable, the "first wave" of response was to get devices into students' hands, she said. The next wave was about internet access, including "this very organized movement to make community college parking lots into Wi-Fi hotspots."

Signal Boost

Some colleges already offered Wi-Fi in their parking lots. Others installed signal boosters to extend their Wi-Fi to specific lots for the pandemic. Some have announced hours of lot operation, mainly to offer security, along with rules for social distancing: one space between each car, for example.

While various institutions require student credentials to log in to the Wi-Fi, others have invited the greater community — including K-12 students — to share access.

Achieving the Dream is currently studying the ways colleges have responded to student needs during the pandemic and to what degree students have engaged with services offered. Stout called it the "COVID Dashboard."

She applauded colleges for their "creativity" thus far in supporting students and noted that some have made Wi-Fi-ready parking lots access points to campus food pantries.

At the start of the pandemic, Tri Cities reached out to students about their Wi-Fi needs. Kresse thought she was covered, as she had Wi-Fi at home. Since then, however, the connection has failed to support her schoolwork and that of her four children (she calls herself a post-traditional student). She bought a new router as soon as she received payment from federal economic stimulus funds, but it did little good.

To limit her need for Wi-Fi, she generally reads transcripts and studies PowerPoints from her synchronous class meetings instead of tuning in live. But there are times — including when she's taking tests — that she needs a strong signal. And for that she heads to her campus lot.

Kresse said it would help students like her if they could log in and out of tests multiple times, to accommodate for Wi-Fi challenges, concerns about academic integrity notwithstanding. Wi-Fi hotspots devices and clear guidelines for who qualifies for them would also be helpful, she said. (Washington State is in the process of providing more of these.)

"It would also be nice if the state or the federal government stepped in," Kresse said. "What this is showing us is an infrastructure problem."

Charles M. Roessel, president of Diné College in the Navajo Nation, said students have used "parking lots, tops of hills and mesas and anywhere else where the signal is strong enough to access our online classes."

The college purchased laptops and wireless hotspots for students and faculty members, but professors have still had to be "flexible, with some of them providing four different delivery methods for one class each and every week (Zoom, text, email and telephone)," Roessel added via email. Many students

drive 30 to 50 miles to get a faint signal, and while their dedication is inspiring, "a student should not expend all of their creativity just to connect to the internet."

Diné has received temporary federal approval to access an unused 2.5 GHZ spectrum, which will allow students to have full and free access internet access, Roessel said. "We are opening this up to all college students and not just Diné."

Marta Yera Cronin, president of Columbia Gorge Community College in Oregon, said that the pandemic has shown, among other things, that "technology is not the great equalizer that some people think it is," even in the U.S. in 2020.

Columbia Gorge's Wi-Fi is always accessible in its parking lots. (Computer labs also stayed open for a time after the instruction went remote, but the college observed that students were afraid to use them, despite strict hygiene and social distancing requirements.) The institution also checked out dozens of hotspot devices to students so that they wouldn't have to visit campus. Some live as far as 90 minutes away.

Cronin's college recently obtained a grant from Google to supply more hotspots, which will be on loan to students indefinitely. It is also negotiating with a local wireless provider to increase internet speed on those devices. For that reason, perhaps, parking lot Wi-Fi hasn't been as popular on campus as it is elsewhere. Still, Cronin saw several nursing students studying together, while apart in their cars, in a parking lot the other day.

"The messaging since day one on internet access is, 'Anything you need, reach out to us, make a request. You don't have to show any need specifically,' because we don't want there to be any extra variables in getting those things to them." ∎

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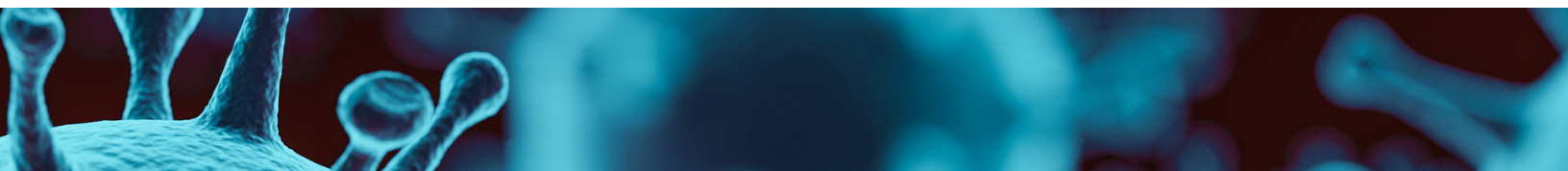
The HyFlex Option for Instruction if Campuses Open This Fall

The HyFlex course model is getting buzz as one way colleges could educate students if their campuses are open but physical distancing remains. A panel of experts discusses the pros and cons.

By Doug Lederman // May 13, 2020

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/SDIPRODUCTIONS

Around the country, and the world, college and university leadership teams are immersed in high-stakes discussions about whether and how to physically open their campuses to students this fall in a way that is both physically safe and educationally sound.

For some institutions, those decisions could be make or break, the difference between survival and closure. Many others still face significant pressures to open: from students (and their parents) who chose to spend their hard-earned dollars on a residential college experience and may take a pass if faced with a virtual one; politicians who want their states and prominent institutions to open up; alumni who are desperate for football Saturdays.

Yet the countervailing pressures are significant, too. To name a few: first and foremost the health and safety of students, faculty and staff members, and those in surrounding communities; the ethical and legal risks of opening prematurely; possible local, state and federal restrictions; and the logistical challenges of housing, feeding and educating hundreds or thousands of students.

This column is not about whether campuses should open; my *Inside Higher Ed* colleagues and our contributors are continuously exploring those questions elsewhere in these pages. This "Transforming Teaching and Learning" space generally examines how colleges and universities ensure that their students get a high-quality education, so the focus here is on how campuses might undertake the central experience of student learning if they are partially or fully open to students in the fall.

Today we explore the pros and cons of one possible approach to doing so: a course model known as HyFlex in which each course is built to give students a choice to attend either in person or online.

And I've solicited some help from three very thoughtful campus learning experts, one of whom has literally written the book on HyFlex, another who has experimented with it and a third who has lots of hard questions about it.

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A thoughtful conversation about how colleges and universities might continue to educate their students in the fall requires you to start with one of a few assumptions. Our bloggers Josh Kim and Eddie Maloney have laid out 15 possible scenarios for campuses this fall, including delays and such, but I'm going to focus on three:

- Campuses fully open to students with few restrictions (highly unlikely);

- Campuses fully virtual (possible, but for many places undesirable); or

- Campuses open with significant physical distancing restrictions in place, or with meaningful numbers of students not physically on campus.

The second scenario would create a significant set of challenges for colleges (some of which I explored in previous columns like this one), most prominently meeting what are almost certainly going to be heightened expectations from students and parents for a more engaging, richer and higher-quality virtual learning experience than most colleges almost amazingly got up and running in a matter of days this spring.

In some ways, though, it's the "in-between" scenarios — neither fully in-person nor fully virtual — that are most confounding to imagine and may be the most difficult for many colleges to pull off.

That, potentially, is where HyFlex comes in. I have to admit that after reading a bunch about it and listening to three very thoughtful people discuss it in the video conversation below, I remain a little unclear about both how, and whether, it might work for most campuses. But a lot of institutions seem to be considering some version of it, so here's my brief attempt to summarize the pros and cons and to point you to as many resources as possible to help you assess it for yourselves — including the wonderful conversation below with these thoughtful experts.

- **Betsy Barre**, executive director of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching at Wake Forest University, in North Carolina

- **Brian Beatty**, associate professor of instructional technologies in the Department of Equity, Leadership Studies and Instructional Technologies at San Francisco State University and author of *Hybrid-Flexible Course Design*, a free ebook.

- **Bonni Stachowiak**, dean of teaching and learning at Vanguard University in California and producer and host of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast.

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So What Is HyFlex?

Beatty and his colleagues at San Francisco State are widely credited with conceiving the Hybrid-Flexible format in the mid-2000s as they sought to make their existing residential instructional technologies master's degree program more accessible to students in their region, many of whom were working adults. The program's leaders did not have the expertise and internal support to build a fully online program, but they wanted to make it possible for students — at their convenience and choice — to participate either online or in person in ways that led to equivalent learning outcomes.

The model they developed, beginning in 2006 but adapted over time, aims to make sure that students aren't penalized from a learning standpoint if they move back and forth between in-person and online participation in the class, from week to week or even class session to class session. Instructors essentially must build a fully online course and a face-to-face version, with the same learning outcomes in both.

Lots of professors have created "blended" or "hybrid" courses that either incorporate digital elements

into face-to-face classes or allow a student to participate in an in-person class from a distance, says Beatty. Typically they decide which elements would be best delivered in person and which most effectively learned via technology, and break up the course that way.

With HyFlex, by contrast, professors "don't have that luxury," Beatty says. "You want to be able create a fully online version and a fully face-to-face version and find ways to bring them together into a single course experience that has multiple participation paths … And the student gets to control whether they're doing it online or in the classroom."

Creating an instructional model that allows students to toggle back and forth between educationally comparable in-person and virtual formats depending on the circumstances at the moment has a lot of resonance at a time like this. Not only is there enormous uncertainty about whether campuses will be able to open physically, says Stachowiak of Vanguard University, but the pandemic could interrupt the educations of many individual students if they or their family members get sick and are forced to quarantine.

Educational interruptions are likely to be an increasing factor of the future, be they hurricanes or forest fires or, of course, pandemics.

"I never hear the response, 'just let them take some time off from their degrees,'" says Stachowiak, who has experimented with flexible, hybrid models in her own teaching. "I see a real emerging need for this kind of flexibility."

Barre, of Wake Forest, started a thought-provoking discussion on the POD Network Listserv about the pros and cons of the HyFlex approach. In that exchange and in our discussion below, she said she saw professors and institutions embracing hybrid-flexible models as if they could just put a camera in the classroom and let far-flung students listen in — "kind of a 1990s distance learning," she said.

"It may be a convenient fix to ensure social distancing, but I'm worried it's popular because it allows schools to say they're offering face-to-face courses without having to change much to stay safe," she said on the Listserv discussion. She stressed the importance of differentiating between the sort of "blended synchronous" approach many professors used to conduct their classes via Zoom this spring,

versus the fully developed online and face-to-face pathways that Beatty champions.

"Are we all talking about the same thing?" she asked.

Barre also raised an issue that has arisen in several discussions of models that differ significantly from what professors are used to, which is how concepts like this would play out at scale, when it becomes the "default" for faculty members who are not experts (and may have inadequate training and support from their institutions).

"What does it look like when everybody is forced to do it?" she asked. "What can the average faculty member be expected to do with a little bit of training, rather than Superman or Superwoman?"

As the conversation evolved, there was general consensus that it's impractical to expect that most professors can build fantastic blended courses that can be delivered both online and in person by fall, especially given workload issues.

"Can a whole campus get there? No, never, and I'm an optimist," said Stachowiak. "I'm aiming for a dimmer switch, where [a course] gets a little bit better all the time." ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/05/13/one-option-delivering-instruction-if-campuses-open-fall-hyflex

Opinion: Communicating Compassionately During COVID-19

We should assist students in ways that address not just academic issues but also financial, health and safety concerns as well as their overall well-being, writes Melissa Dennihy.

By Melissa Dennihy // May 8, 2020

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/PEOPLEIMAGES

For most college faculty, distance learning is now in full swing. We are beginning to adjust to new platforms, new routines and new normals. We are also fortunate to be among those working safely from home during the COVID-19 pandemic — but our students may not be in the same position. Communicating compassionately with students is vital to determining how they are doing right now and trying to assist them in ways that address not just academic issues but also financial, health and safety concerns as well as their overall well-being.

What are some of the ways we can show compassion to our students in the midst of a public health crisis? Beyond sharing information about courses, class sessions and assignments, what other forms of communication can we initiate with and among students to help them during this challenging time?

Ask students how they are doing.
Not every communication has to address academic issues. I have started sending students weekly emails asking how they are doing and making clear that I am genuinely interested in

their responses. I do this in part because I've noticed that students often begin emails by apologizing: "I'm so sorry this essay is late, but my grandmother has just been diagnosed with COVID-19." Or "I apologize for missing this week's work, but I've been working extra janitorial shifts at the hospital."

Students should not feel the need to apologize to their professors for grappling with the crisis that has upturned many of their lives. By initiating communications with students that remind them that I care about and want to

acknowledge the realities they are facing, I hope to convey to them that they needn't ever apologize for or be hesitant to communicate with me about what they are dealing with beyond academic contexts.

Support students' nonacademic needs. I recently put together an emergency guide for students with information about unemployment benefits, health insurance, food pantries, mental health counseling, industry-specific relief funds, childcare for essential employees and accessing the latest updates about COVID-19 in our area. In doing so, I wanted to inform students about important resources that may be useful to them. But I also wanted to emphasize that conversations about health, safety and self-care have as much of a place in the COVID-19 classroom as do academic discussions. By making nonacademic concerns part of the classroom context, we make it easier for students to ask for help or share concerns about nonacademic issues should they wish to do so.

Offer students a space to discuss nonacademic topics. While it's important to help students feel comfortable communicating with professors about their nonacademic concerns, we should also recognize that students may not always wish to talk to us about these sorts of things. Sometimes talking to classmates can feel easier

> **"** Students should not feel the need to apologize to their professors for grappling with the crisis that has upturned many of their lives. **"**

or more comfortable, which is why it can be helpful to create a virtual space, such as a student-to-student discussion forum, where students can share and discuss nonacademic concerns with one another.

In the forums I've created for my own students, students can ask and answer questions like, "Does anyone know of a relief fund for New York City bartenders?" Or "Can anyone recommend a food pantry in my neighborhood that has infant formula?" Having forums like these creates a greater sense of community and allows the virtual classroom to function as a support system — not just for academic concerns, but for other, arguably more urgent, questions and topics students want and need to talk about.

Create a space for students to unwind. Encourage students to attend to their mental health and emotional well-being by refocusing, relaxing and trying to find small moments of joy.

Consider sharing with students the abundance of free resources for self-care and pleasure that are out there right now — everything from exercise and meditation classes to virtual museum and gallery tours to livestreams of concerts, theater and operatic performances. You might create a space for students to find links to various such resources and even consider offering extra credit to students who choose to write a short response piece about an experience or event in which they participated.

Trust your students. Some students may ask for extensions or flexibility with their coursework without offering an explanation for why this is necessary. Remember that students may have situations impacting their academic performance that they are uncomfortable or even fearful of discussing with professors or classmates. Choose to trust them rather than expecting or requiring an explanation from them. Believe

that whatever it is they are juggling is more than enough to warrant the extension or adjustment they are requesting. Be compassionate.

If there is one thing I have been learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that while all of us are affected by it, the specific ways in which each of us is impacted are not always apparent to or well understood by others. Compassion facilitates trust, understanding and communication between faculty members and students, and these can be critical not only to students' academic success but also to their overall well-being during this extraordinarily challenging time. ◼

Read Original Article ▸▸   https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/05/08/instructors-need-assist-students-ways-go-beyond-just-academics-opinion

The teacher I am now is who my students deserved before the pandemic took hold of my classroom, writes Christina Wyman.

By **Christina Wyman** // **May 14, 2020**

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/DAMIRCUDIC

Like educators across the country, my plan for the second half of the semester came to a screeching halt in March and left me dealing with unforeseen issues. Should I demand synchronous meetings or to give students the space and time to navigate our content independently? Which parts of the curriculum now seem superfluous under the circumstances? To what extent should I incorporate technology that I would not have otherwise used? How can I maintain at least some course integrity while remaining realistic about the pandemic's impact on my — and their — responsibilities?

Those are only some of the questions that have narrated my approach to the latter half of the semester. A heavy daily dose of placing myself in my students' shoes helped guide me toward the answers that I thought best suited my classroom.

As we moved forward, I did not demand synchronous meetings, I dropped several activities that seemed ill suited for online engagement (and reapplied the points elsewhere, to the students' collective advantage), and — based on nothing other than principle — gave myself permission to forgo using technology that I would not have otherwise incorporated

into my instruction. To my mind, I did well to adopt a student-first ethos for the remainder of our semester together, having made most of my decisions based on the metaphorical mile I walked in their shoes. After all, my online class was one of five or more courses that each of my students found themselves navigating from home. To assume that my curriculum and my expectations were among the most important would have been arrogant and unhelpful to both my students and my colleagues.

My Smartest Decision

What I could not have known in advance was that perhaps the smartest decision I made was to

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ask my students to respond to a journal during our final online session, which occurred during the last full week of April. It was a simple request:

Please drop me a comment about your course experience. I believe that we all did the best we possibly could under the circumstances, but I'd love to hear from you. Please respond with as short or as long of a response as you'd like.

Their responses ran the gamut. More than half of the students candidly thanked me for the asynchronous arrangement. Many highlighted their appreciation for the opportunity to complete the work on their own time, using the instructional videos that I posted to YouTube. Predictably, many students expressed being overwhelmed by what their professors were requiring of them during this transition, but they generally highlighted other classes as the culprit. I'm not patting myself on the back here. I'm simply rehashing their responses. (For the record, one student said that while he "loved" our face-to-face sessions, he found my videos deadly boring.)

What I could not have predicted was the sheer number of students who would discuss how their complicated home lives made their online navigation far more difficult than if they were able to remain on the campus. Nearly one-quarter of my roster cited having to navigate how toxic parents or siblings often

distracted them from the work that needed to be done. Not one of my students own or rent their own homes; even my married students live with their families. All of my students are legal adults, and for better or for worse, each of them returned home to a long-standing family dynamic.

Perhaps as gut-wrenching as the allusions to toxicity, those same students apologized if their work wasn't of the same quality as it was before the university closed. They were concerned not only about being able to complete their work while quarantined with problematic family members but also about my interpretation of their products.

For students with difficult home lives, the stress is layered and twofold. The dominant discourse about educational equity and access during the pandemic typically highlights socioeconomic differences across students. Discussions about equity and access pointing to gaps in psychological wellness — those that might highlight the realities of how destructive family members hold the cards over a students' capacity to complete their semester in one piece, if at all — remain elusive.

It is because of my own experiences with generational abuse and childhood trauma that I know better than to chalk up my students' concerns to run-of-the-mill, healthy family conflict. In truth,

an overnight transition to online learning can impact more than the socioeconomically advantaged. If instructors take the time to investigate, this transition might reveal how online learning is made much harder for students returning to abusive family systems.

A View From the Inside

A toxic family system is aggressive and unstable. It's punitive and sabotaging. The warfare, in my case, was psychological. Such a system might include a mother threatened by her daughter's attention to her schoolwork. Perhaps the mother holds tuition over her child's head as punishment for not meeting Mom's emotional needs, as was the case during my college experience. Or it could be a sibling's ceaseless refusal to cooperate with boundaries and parents who do not intervene. A toxic family system might include a father who enables Mom's toxic behavior, or the other way around. Or perhaps Dad uses internet access as leverage with which to punish his adult children — the same children who require it to pass their classes.

The literature on toxic family systems is robust and growing. While there is no singular framework for what a toxic family looks like, the outcomes are nearly universal. Students who return home to such families are anxious and stressed. Many of them are scared and deeply worried about when — if — they will have an opportunity to return

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to college. The news media has reported on the pandemic-related surge in domestic violence calls. The dynamics I describe here have earned a rightful place inside of those statistics, but the insidiousness of psychological abuse means that they are often not recognized or acknowledged by concerned media.

As I consider the multitudinous ways by which toxic family dynamics manifest — particularly those where the abuse is psychological — I am forced to come to terms with how completing a full-time online load would have been nigh impossible for me under the current circumstances. I can only hope that my professors of two decades ago would have demonstrated a bit of humanity.

What I know, as a professor and a survivor of childhood trauma, is that campus can be a safe place

for students who do battle with familial abuse both in between and during semesters. Many campuses have robust psychological services that students can easily and confidentially access. The built-in friendships, relationships and social distractions are, for many students, a psychologically nurturing added bonus.

I also know that, while the campus provides something of a refuge, familial abuse does not magically stop at its gates. Whether with threats, ultimatums, outsize demands or unnecessarily distracting expectations, toxic families find ways to complicate their adult child's educational experience whether or not their child is living at home. That is a reality with which I have firsthand experience.

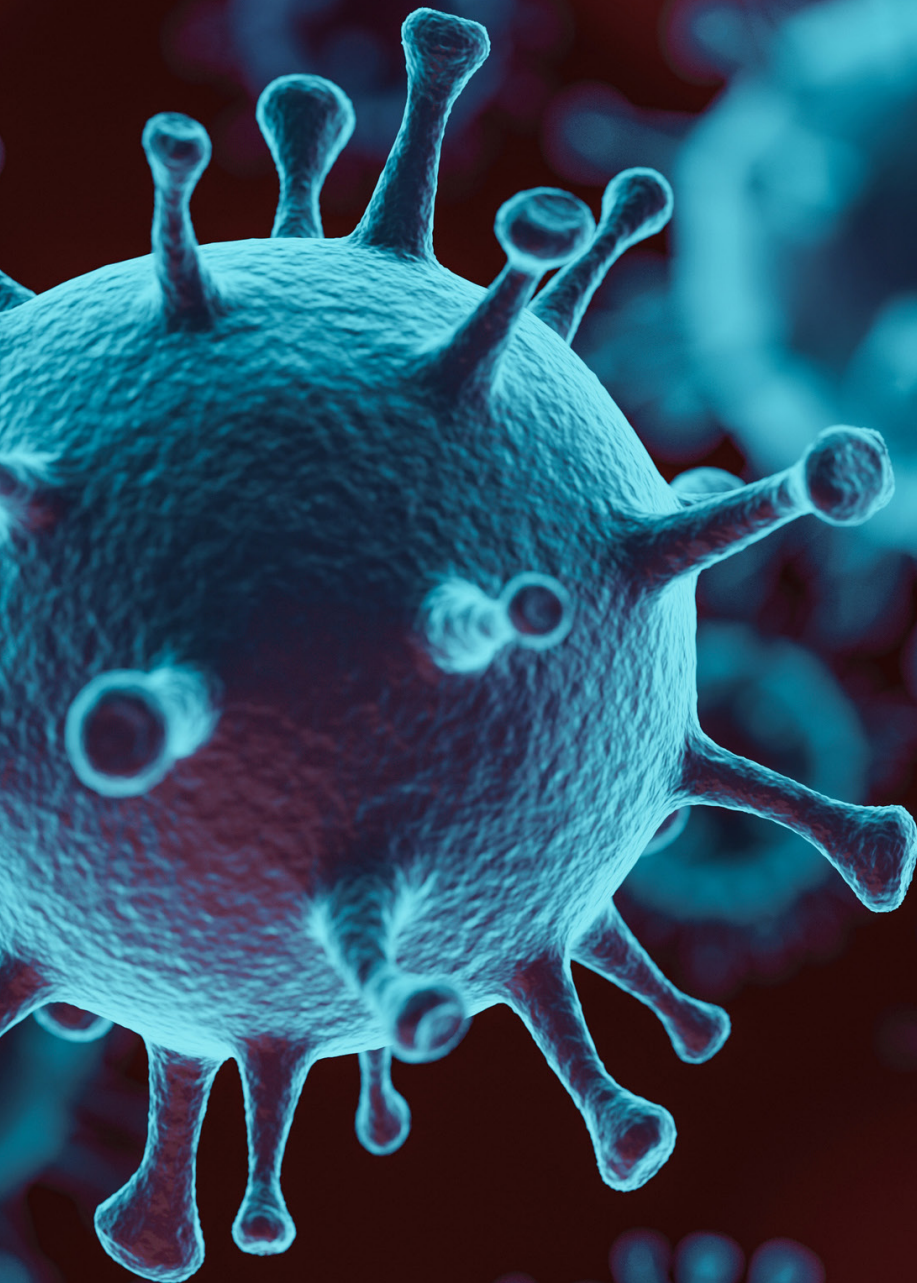I wouldn't have minded an opportunity to get honest with my own professors about what

it meant to be a first-generation college student from a toxic family. I realize now that I should not have waited until the 14th week of school to ask my students about the experience of their transition. Their responses provide a pedagogical tool that can — and should — be used year-round, regardless of whether a class is meeting in person.

In my future classes, I will ask students from the beginning whether they'd like me to know and understand anything about their ability to fully participate in our course together. Their recent responses have reminded me that they deserve instructors who care about their obstacles before a pandemic takes hold of the classroom. After all, if students are going to express concern over my interpretations of their products, the empathic response would be to express concern over their interpretations of mine. ■

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