UFF/FEA Higher Education Re-Opening Committee Guidelines

Priorities & Recommendations

UFF
UNITED FACULTY OF FLORIDA

FEA
Florida Education Association
affiliated with NEA, AFT, AFL-CIO

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OVERVIEW

Institutions of higher education have been essential to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in innumerable ways. Colleges and universities have produced many of the heroes who are at the center of that fight. Physicians, nurses, other frontline medical providers, materials science engineers, and researchers developing virus antibodies and future vaccines are just some of those who graduated from our institutions of higher education.

Current students in these disciplines and all others depend on college or university education for their future livelihoods. Florida and the nation are dependent on these educated and skilled workers beyond the pandemic. Our mission will require continued investment in Florida's colleges and universities during this severe economic downturn. In short, Florida should not sacrifice their futures. **There should be no reduction in funding for academics and research in our colleges and universities**.

For full economic recovery, Florida cannot add to the unemployment numbers by reducing faculty, staff, graduate assistants, or adjuncts. There are approximately 100,000 full and part-time staff at Florida's public colleges and universities. Their salaries, plus other spending on higher education, provide an economic engine for our state. These institutions and our public schools are among the largest employers in their local communities. Any reduction in funding to our higher education system will create a negative multiplier impact on our economy which is the reverse of the positive multiplier impact provided in strong economic times.

On-campus innovations to combat the virus will need funding to protect the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff who return to campus for hybrid and face-to-face classes. Adequate funding will be required for sanitized facilities, personal protective equipment, and comprehensive mental health and community health services on campuses. There must also be resources (either institutional, state, federal, or community funds) for testing and contact tracing.

All of these, and more, are part of the following guidelines and best practices established by this committee to ensure a safe and healthy re-opening of our public colleges and universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Public Health and Safety

Surveys by national organizations, the Florida Department of Education, local school districts, and by colleges and universities demonstrate that a return to campus must include plans developed in accordance with local, state, and national health professionals. Recognizing that the knowledge on COVID-19 is constantly updating, the committee takes the broadest view with regard to public health issues. These guidelines incorporate the most up-to-date information from around the nation and from international experts. It is important to consider practices that ensure the health and safety of students, faculty and staff as well as preparing to make timely adjustments if/when an occurrence of COVID-19 is detected. Not only will this aid in maintaining the health of our faculty, staff, and students, but will from serve to prevent campuses from becoming vehicles for community spread.

Requirements

- Create infrastructure and resources to test, trace, and isolate new cases on campus.
- Every room must have alcohol-based hand sanitizer at the entrance (with a requirement to use it), a supply of anti-viral hand wipes and/or disinfecting spray. Every classroom must be disinfected every night.
- Require facemasks until a vaccine becomes available. Masks should be provided at the entrance to every building for those who need them. It is the responsibility of the college/university to ensure students/faculty/staff have access to masks.
- Clearly post social distancing regulations and enforcement.
- Provide training for faculty/staff/students on proper handwashing, hand sanitizer, restroom use. Restrooms should be sanitized and cleaned on a regular basis throughout the day.
- Create safe transportation strategies to and on campus.
- For residential students, provide on-campus or in-town isolation spaces.
- Create clear protocols to communicate to students when/where they need to self-isolate.
- Create dormitory- and cafeteria-specific protocols for access.

Highly Recommended

- Mark one-way traffic flow where possible.
- Add water bottle filling spouts to all water fountains (bottles and name tags to be distributed to those without personal bottles).
- Add social distancing markings for waiting in lines.
- Purchase and change anti-viral A/C filters frequently and by schedule.
- Create for dormitories: single rooms or verified/verifiable "bubble-buddies."
- Where campus transportation exists, create safety and disinfectant protocols.

Recommended

- Increase hybrid classes.
- Touchless door entries (key fobs, etc.) where feasible (i.e. dormitory entrances).
- Consider staggering student attendance in face-to-face classes to aid in maintaining proper social distancing and provide recordings of all class meetings for students unable to attend in-person sessions. This would require attention and adherence to privacy concerns.
- Use external, off-campus spaces for lower class density.

Further Suggestions

- Create awareness of differing levels of activities that will impact the level of risk for students, faculty, and staff at our colleges and universities:
  - Lowest risk: continuing virtual-only learning options, activities, and events.
  - More Risk: limiting the size of classes, activities, and in-person events
  - Highest Risk: full-sized, in-person classes, activities, and in-person events.
- Purchase full-room cleaning devices, if shown to be effective.
- Shorten fall semester to 12 weeks for residential students. This will prevent them going home, returning to campus infected, then infecting more students before everyone disperses for Winter break.

Social and Emotional Well-being

As a nation, we have suffered a collective trauma. For the wider community, these have been difficult times to understand and process and this is even more challenging for college and university students, already working to adjust to life as independent adults. As important as physical health and safety and student success are, we must recognize that they cannot happen without also ensuring that the social and emotional needs of students (and their educators) are met. It is an important element in their success.

Prolonged physical distancing, death and illness in our families and communities, and economic disruption will leave many students and faculty with ongoing trauma and mental health issues, and it is incumbent on us to meet those needs, now more than ever. These impacts will be widespread, and an adequate response will require additional staff with expertise in mental health care to provide trauma and sensitivity training for staff, students, and parents. All staff and faculty should be trained in how to identify students struggling with trauma, and how to refer them to campus mental health professionals for additional support.

Requirements

- Reduce student and parent anxiety by providing clear information to students and families as to the safety of re-opening campuses.

- Prioritize existing mental health programs and staff (rather than outside consultants) and respect their expertise in developing protocols and triage care.
- Provide a single website for students and parents, and another for faculty and staff, that list all online resources that would be different than normal, including:
  - Mental health resources
  - Current information with the source of recommendations, who made them, and when they were made
  - Reassurance to students and staff about the physical space such as new protocols for cleaning, access, etc. that will make people more confident that they are safe
  - Reach out to student groups so they know how to access and share resources
- Ensure IACS-recommended ratio student-to-mental health professional of 1:1499 FTE.
- Ensure mental Health Counselors are available online and assist counselors in reaching out to students with technological barriers.
- Include student and faculty/staff groups in decision-making and in the dissemination of information.
- Provide clear information about accessing mental health resources included in ALL communication (emails, text, websites, online learning resources/classrooms, etc.).

Highly Recommended

Conduct mental health assessments or surveys by app or other to get a feeling for anxiety levels of the students, faculty, and staff.

- Create mental health assessment or surveys to get a feeling for anxiety levels of the students, faculty, and staff.
- Provide extra resources for vulnerable populations: (LGBTQ, international, low-income, minority, housing-insecure students).
- Train administration and faculty in the use of a trauma-informed approach to dealing with the reopening of campus, including reducing stigma for those who have been quarantined, contracted the virus, and/or who have been caregivers.
- Create a method for students, faculty, and staff to report issues without fear of reprisal.

Recommended

- Create spaces on campus for grieving and healing.
- Bring students on campus early to reacquaint and reconnect them.
- Engage student leaders and communications staff to create materials to orient people to the new normal.

Safe Learning and Working Conditions

There is much truth in the saying that "Educators' working conditions are students' learning conditions." Many of those who work on campuses (as well as some students) in Florida's

colleges and universities have underlying risk factors for COVID-19, either due to age or a medical condition. This will be a key deciding factor in their return to campus.

Faculty and graduate assistants wish to return to campus and to teach their students in person once again, but doing so means that there must be safeguards in place to ensure that the simple act of returning to work does not jeopardize their health. Class assignments and modalities must take into consideration several factors, including age and underlying health conditions. All CDC and Florida Department of Health guidelines must be met in facilities holding in-person classes. Other scientific evidence may also be referred to in making these decisions.

Requirements

- Define health requirement for clearance to return to campus: recent negative tests, etc.
- Provide access to healthcare and free testing for all employees.
- Create test and trace mechanisms.
- Create clear protocols for notifying public health officials, students, staff, and faculty of positive COVID-19 cases.
- Reduce class sizes to ensure social distancing.
- Provide computers, webcams, high-speed internet access, etc. for ALL instructional personnel OR create an easy and quick reimbursement stipend. These must be provided just as classroom space or equipment would normally be provided for on-campus class meetings.
- Provide additional compensation for additional work through Impact Bargaining.
- Promote a method for faculty and staff to report health, safety, and academic issues related to the pandemic without fear of reprisal.
- Create a clear policy (respecting HIPAA) for identifying high-risk students and employees.
- Provide flexible use of PAID sick leave that does not come out of accrued sick leave. The institution should fund this from the paid two weeks in the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act/Families First Coronavirus Response Act. No negative repercussions for sick leave when required by policies and/or advised by medical professionals.
- Clear protocols for class cancellation, substitution, or relocation due to symptoms or confirmed exposure and/or how those classes will be covered/made up. Whatever conditions are created must be uniform across departments and colleges within the same institution.
- Include adjunct faculty in healthcare and sick leave plans, and in testing programs.
- Provide documentation and support for adjuncts to be able to access pandemic unemployment insurance, and to traditional unemployment insurance.
- Hire more maintenance staff due to increased need for cleaning and disinfecting. Do NOT require non-maintenance personnel (staff, faculty) to be responsible for implementing cleaning protocols.

Highly Recommended

- Limit campus access to non-students and non-employees.
- Provide staff and faculty with training on how to identify students struggling with anxiety and/or trauma and how to refer them to mental health professionals for support.
- Create options for distance learning/instruction which are not grossly out of alignment with previous class sizes or course loads

Recommended

- Training for staff on use and storage of new chemicals, including interactions.

Student Success

The mobilization of Florida's higher education institutions and faculties to 100% distance learning may not have been the complete paradigm shift experienced by K-12 educators, but it came with countless obstacles.

Students living away at college were displaced and returned home, if they could get home. Closing of campuses was instituted and the instructional platform for most professors and graduate assistants had to be adapted almost overnight. The tremendous workload and the rapidity with which this was accomplished is a striking example of how well our higher education system is able to respond to formidable problems when they arise.

This massive shift was not without a heavy impact on many students, both academically and emotionally. Therefore, plans for reopening must integrate all factors in the educational process in order to support all students in both their academic success and in developing the proficiencies necessary for their future achievements.

Requirements

- Provide expanded access to broadband and technology to close the "digital divide". Identify students who lack sufficient access to the internet and the hardware that has become critical to learning, and determine solutions for equal access (i.e. checked out or loaner computers, hard drives, broadband access, etc.).
- Implement a 1:1 device initiative for all students.
- Waive internet access fee for students.
- Class sizes/configurations must be adapted to ensure safe social distancing.
- Student Assistance Programs must be upscaled to include all previous needs as well as pandemic needs. They must be easily found and accessible.
- Provide increased ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act support (ASL interpreters, physical and technological needs of the visually impaired, etc. available for all course modalities). Purchase <u>excellent</u> captioning software (End reliance on YouTube,

Google, and programs not specific to captioning. They are not accurate enough and are a disservice to our students).

- Face shields and/or clear masks for ASL interpreters and staff who interact with hearing-impaired students.
- Programs that focus on practicum and/or clinical applications will need specific guidance from national accrediting institutions to ensure students can complete program requirements.

Highly Recommended

- Hire more staff to ensure Student Assistance Programs are available when students need them with no wait times.

Recommended

- Provide extra tutoring services for struggling students.

Further Suggestions

- Bookend on-campus residential students:
  - Allow entering freshmen to live on-campus to better integrate to college life.
  - Allow seniors and graduate students to live on-campus to be mentored by faculty as they complete their degrees.
  - Sophomores and juniors would be on-line only.

Investment in Florida's Colleges and Universities

Investment in Florida's colleges and universities is an investment in economic recovery. Our forty institutions of public higher education are major drivers of our state economy. The state estimated in 2013 that for every $100 invested by the state of Florida in higher education, the boost to our economy was $109.40. With interest rates flat-lined, there is nowhere else that the state of Florida can currently get a return on investment of 9.4%.

With over two million Floridians having applied for unemployment insurance, any cuts in personnel of the roughly 100,000 people directly employed by our public colleges and universities will only add to the state's hardship and slow our economic recovery. In some places, these institutions are the largest employer in a city or county. In addition, our research universities are among the world's best in medical and technological innovation, neither of which we can do without.

The interventions required by the pandemic will require more, not less, investment in public health and technology on our campuses. COVID-19 has made clearer than ever the inequalities in our society and underscores the need for public investment to combat this

inequity. High-speed broadband, modern technology and hardware are essential for the future success of Florida's graduates.

Rather than struggling to return to an under-funded status quo, it is urged that the state of Florida take the lead in providing increased funding to our institutions of higher education. We have the human resources in this, the third most-populous state, to be leaders in every field of achievement; what is wanting is the investment in developing those resources.

To that end, all faculty, graduate assistants, staff, administrators, and trustees will need to create and support new funding strategies. The use of state rainy day funds should be mandated. Flexibility in the rules and/or regulations related to carry-forward funds, capital funds, and even foundation funds should be encouraged, so that our colleges and universities continue to lead as we all face the challenges of a pandemic together.

Requirements

- Ensure no funding cuts to academics or research.
- Allow for additional funding for health and sanitation provisions.
- Provide additional funding for necessary staffing increases.
- Provide additional funding for technology purchases.
- Use CARES Act funds as provided in legislation (no waivers) to replace tax shortfalls.
- Strongly support the passage by the U.S. Senate of the HEROES Act which provides $26.721 billion for public higher education, nationally.
- Ensure Florida education funding is in compliance with the requirements in the HEROES Act, so that we may access the maximum in federal assistance provided.
- Draw down state rainy day fund of $4.5 billion, as allowed.

Highly Recommended

- Urge the Legislature and/or governor to allow for waivers/flexibility where needed, in particular s.1011.45(5) and s.1013.841, Florida Statutes.
- Draw down institutions' reserves to as low as 2% to make up funding shortfalls and allow funds to go towards recurring costs.
- Use University and College Foundations' funds to support academics and research.

CONCLUSION

The United Faculty of Florida and the Florida Education Association would like to acknowledge and thank all of those who contributed their time and expertise to the Reopening Colleges and Universities Committee once again. It is our hope that this document serves as a guideline for safely returning students, faculty, and staff to school campuses. We realize that Florida is a diverse state and that what makes sense for one community might not make sense for another one.

This document is not meant to be a static one. New information is being learned about the Coronavirus daily and as our knowledge of the virus grows, the knowledge gained should be incorporated into any plans to reopen school campuses.

As plans continue to evolve, we firmly believe that the path forward must be centered around the shared goals of physical health and safety, student success, social and emotional well-being, safe working conditions and an enduring investment in public education.

There is still much that is unknown and concrete answers to some very important questions remain elusive. But what we know beyond a shadow of a doubt is that Florida's colleges and universities remain the bedrock of just not their communities but the state and nation as well. Together, students, parents and educators can work to expand horizons, to ensure that Florida's public education systems don't just "return to normal" but come out of this crisis even stronger and with a greater sense of connection to the families they serve.

APPENDIX AND FURTHER READING

- American Federation of Teachers: A Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities
- National Education Association: Initial Member Brainstorm on Schools' Re-Opening for In-Person Learning
- Education International: Guidance to Reopen Schools and Education Institutions
- Joint Statement of National Education and Civil Rights Leaders on COVID-19 School Closure
- Florida School Boards Association Recommendations for Re-opening Florida's Public Schools
- Centers for Disease Control: Draft Reopening Guidance (Pages 4-6 are school related)
- Centers for Disease Control: School Reopening Decision Tree (updated May 15)
- Centers for Disease Control: School and Child Care Programs Guidance (updated May 15)
- UNICEF: Framework for Reopening Schools
- Great Lakes Center: Education in the Time of COVID-19: Remote learning Part 1
- McKinsey & Company: Perspectives for Opening Schools
- Education Resource Services: Financial Implications of COVID-19
- Education Next: A Blueprint for Back to School
- How to Reopen Schools: A 10-Point Plan for Keeping Equity at the Center
- Gov. DeSantis: May 4 Executive Order
- Re-Open Florida Task Force's Report to Gov. DeSantis
- WHO Guide for Reopening
- WHO Guidance for schools, workplaces, and institutions
- Washington Choir CDC report on dangers of band/chorus/theatre
- An easier to read article about it:
- CDC report on toilet plumes:
- Minnesota Report shows 3 likely possible projection models
- NIH Report on how long coronavirus lives on surfaces

Documents to consider for trainings:

- This video shows how quickly virus can spread by touching objects
- Mask training video (there are many):
- Mask and Glove video