



San Diego Community College District
Office of the Chancellor

April 30, 2020

CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19: UPDATE #8

To: SDCCD Colleagues and Friends

From: Constance M. Carroll, Chancellor

It seems like a year rather than a month and a half since we plunged into the many changes in our instructional and operational formats as the result of the COVID-19 crisis. The continuing efforts of our faculty, classified professionals, and administrators have enabled us to succeed in meeting the vast majority of the needs of our students and the community, from the conversion of class sections to online and distance education formats to the conversion of support services and administration to remote operations to adjusting to federal and state guidelines to providing additional resources for our students. Thank you all for a job brilliantly done!

PLANNING FOR THE FALL SEMESTER

I am writing today about the fall semester, since I have been receiving lots of questions about our plans. I also have provided an article (below) so that you can see how community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities are addressing this issue. All are grappling with whether to reopen campuses, whether to restrict instruction to the online modality, or whether to implement a hybrid of these two approaches. Some institutions, like Sierra College (a community college in northern California), have indicated that the online approach will continue through the fall. Other institutions, like the University of Ohio, have indicated that they plan to reopen their campuses for in-person instruction. Most institutions have not as yet made a final decision.

From my perspective and from the perspective of our Presidents and leadership team, it is too early to make a firm decision since we have yet to see the remaining trajectory of the COVID-19 contagion. Because our decision will affect students' health and lives, as well as the health and lives of all of us who serve them, we need to exercise great care and we need to base our final decision on what is best from a public health standpoint.

At the same time, we are greatly concerned about instructional quality, recognizing that the online format is very difficult, especially for the laboratory sciences, for the clinical requirements of the allied health fields, and for many career-technical fields. Simulations and videos, while very helpful, are no substitute for in-person instruction and in-person experiences, especially data gathering and experimentation. This is a dilemma that has not been solved and probably cannot be solved without some compromises.

While we hope to have a firm decision well before the start of the fall semester, let me share with you a summary of our current planning.

- We are preparing for a fall semester that can be either in-person or online, depending upon where the COVID-19 situation is at that time. At present, the "tilt" seems to be toward the online/distance education format, albeit with some hybrid variations if that is possible. Since the COVID-19 trajectory is projected to have a spike sometime in the fall semester, we will need to monitor this closely and heed the direction of health officials. We also need to realistically assess the impact of opening classes at the start of the semester only to switch them to an online format if there is a mid-semester resurgence of COVID-19.
- We are exploring the possibility of allowing some designated laboratory, clinical, and first-responder classes to meet on campus, either entirely or in a hybrid fashion, and certainly with the

enactment of social-distancing requirements. This may well happen but *only if approved by health officials*. Many institutions are looking into this possibility due to the serious problems that have been encountered in the online/distance education format for science, allied health, and certain career-technical fields. If this is not possible, a greater effort will be required to develop simulations and other substitute formats.

This is a frustrating situation for everyone, including for our students. The decisions we must make are difficult because there is no simple blueprint for how to adjust to this novel coronavirus and because the decisions have life-or-death implications. It is my hope that we will be able to make a well-informed, final decision about the fall semester no later than July 31.

As we move forward, I am grateful for your patience, as well as for your support and understanding, as we work through this COVID-19 journey together. Please see the article below.



Dr. Constance M. Carroll
Chancellor



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Highlighting Strategies for Student Success

Anxiety builds as California colleges consider how and when to resume on-campus fall courses

Schools considering online, in-person, or a mix of both as pandemic continues

By Ashley A. Smith and Michael Burke | April 30, 2020

Millions of California college students and their families are anxiously waiting to hear whether on-campus classes will resume this fall while college administrators are weighing the options to safely return students and faculty to campuses.

So far, no one is saying when these decisions will be made. And that has everyone on edge.

Increasing the anxiety for some students is the impending enrollment deposit deadline for incoming freshman and transfer students to the University of California and California State University institutions. Only eight of 23 CSU campuses extended the deposit deadline from May 1 to June 1 to give students extra time and to preserve enrollments for the 2020-21 school year.

Not knowing if classes will resume on campus delays decisions on where to live or work this fall. These decisions could impact an estimated 3.3 million California college students.

"There's just been a general lack of forward-thinking communications from a lot of campuses and it's been detrimental to a lot of students' thought about the future and continuing education," said Valerie Johnson, a UC Berkeley student from Southern California, during a webinar about student needs amid the pandemic.

"I can't sign a lease for off-campus housing if my classes are going to be online because I can't afford to live in the Bay Area or in Berkeley if it's not essential for me to do so," said Johnson, a member of the UC Student Association.

California university officials say they aren't ready to decide whether classes will continue to be offered virtually, in-person or a mix of both this fall that could involve limiting the number of students in classes. But they're

considering a number of contingency plans.

"We understand that this period of uncertainty can be especially difficult for our campus community and, therefore, continue to share timely updates with our campus as decisions are made," said a spokesperson for San Diego State University where planning is underway for multiple scenarios.

"The university is weighing a variety of options: looking at academic, residential, clinical and student life implications, each of which will need to take into account the possibility of continued social distancing guidelines."

Christina Paxson, the president of Brown University in Rhode Island, wrote in the New York Times that colleges must reopen in the fall or face the prospect of catastrophic financial losses.

She urged institutions to "develop public health plans now that build on three basic elements of controlling the spread of infection: test, trace and separate." Until a vaccine is available, colleges must also plan to safely handle the possibility of a campus infection while maintaining their academic operations, she said.

Paxson recommended colleges consider setting aside residential space for isolating and quarantining sick students, if necessary. "Our students will have to understand that until a vaccine is developed, campus life will be different," she said.

One roadblock that could prevent colleges and universities from allowing students to return to campus is concern over legal liability. Colleges will want to avoid reopening until they know students and faculty will be safe on campus, said Edward Cramp, a San Diego-based attorney who represents universities across the United States.

"I think it's definitely a big concern," he said. "Universities have an obligation to provide a safe learning environment and a safe work environment for their students and their employees and their faculty."

Cramp said liability was less of an issue for colleges and universities when they were open in the spring "because we didn't really understand what we're dealing with."

"I think now we know that this is something that is highly contagious and really can affect all age groups," he added. "I think we're all on notice now. We've got to make sure that we don't reopen our institutions in an environment where we aren't fairly certain that we can do so safely."

Administrators at many of California's public colleges and universities have already said that they won't make the decision to re-open on their own without consulting with the governor's office, state and county public health officials, and their system leaders.

The stakes became apparent last week when California State University-Fullerton got backlash after a report said it had decided to forgo in-person instruction in favor of all virtual.

"There were reports I said that Fullerton is canceling classes and going fully virtual for the fall. Let me be clear, that is false," Pam Oliver, provost and vice president for academic affairs for the campus, said during a webinar with faculty last week.

The university reiterated that no final decision had been made and like many colleges, Fullerton officials are examining every option.

Oliver said while the goal is "face-to-face, on-campus instruction," the university also is asking faculty to be prepared to start the semester teaching virtually.

"Like every university in America, we are working through the unknowns of the current pandemic as we plan for the Fall 2020 semester," said Chi-Chung Keung, a spokeswoman for the university. "While we will be flexible because the situation is changing rapidly, we expect to finalize this decision as the facts and circumstances become clear."

San Jose State University officials also said news reports that it was planning to offer most of its fall courses online were "deceiving," said Kenneth Mashinchi, a spokesman for the university, in an email.

"We are currently discussing plans for hybrid and online classes in the fall," Mashinchi said. "Nothing is set in stone. Making a firm decision on the plan relies not just on us but on the recommendations of the Governor of California, state and county public health officials and the California State University system."

Tracking the spread of the coronavirus and getting the advice of public health officials are part of the equation for universities to decide when to bring students and faculty back to campuses.

A Stanford University spokesman said that no decision about reopening classes for the fall quarter has been made and that the university is "closely tracking the latest public health guidance as the circumstances of the COVID-19

pandemic continue to evolve.”

In Los Angeles County, the Claremont Colleges, a consortium of seven private institutions is working on a reopening plan for all of the colleges. “We have established working groups that are making progress to determine what actions are needed to bring academic, research and residential programs back to campus for the fall semester in ways that are guided by the best public health practices and government direction,” said spokesperson Laura Muna-Landa.

The 2.2 million-student California community college system, the nation’s largest system of higher education, is a network of 114 colleges that must also decide when to reopen campuses for in-person instruction. (In addition, there is Calbright College, the new online-only college.) Unlike the UC and CSU system, each community college has its own board of trustees. The community colleges’ chancellor’s office has not yet issued any guidance for fall instruction but Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley has recommended that colleges prepare for the possibility of online instruction to continue “in the event the stay-at-home order and social distancing measures are still in place,” said Christina Jimenez, a spokeswoman for the chancellor’s office.

At Los Angeles-area Compton College, which is part of the state’s community college system, President Keith Curry said he’s also examining every option for his students to return to campus classes.

But “I’m in no rush to make this decision,” he said. “There are a lot of contingency plans out there, but what is the best way possible?”

Some public health officials are warning that a second wave of coronavirus cases could happen this fall and winter, Curry said. “In my contingency plans, if we have one COVID-19 case on campus, I would shut it down,” he said.

Curry said he’s concerned about the “unintended consequences” of re-opening the campus this fall. Campus leaders have to consider not only how to socially distance an English class of 30 students to perhaps 15, for example, but create a pandemic plan for all of the people who aren’t students who visit college campuses, he said.

San Diego’s four community college campuses, for example, are planning for both on-campus and online options, Chancellor Constance Carroll said, in a campus update last week. Carroll oversees the San Diego City, Mesa, Miramar and continuing education colleges.

“As we get close to the start of the fall semester, we will make a final determination about which mode of instruction will be pursued, depending upon the status of COVID-19 at the time,” she said. But the community college district is examining a few different strategies, including shortening the academic term to 12 weeks or creating hybrid classes that would be offered online but allow students and faculty to also meet in-person.

Across the 10 University of California campuses, officials are planning for a wide range of possibilities for this fall. None of those universities have decided how they will offer classes.

“It is too soon to predict and evaluate the impacts of COVID-19, if any, on UC instruction beyond summer,” said Stett Holbrook, a UC System spokesman. “We will continue to carefully monitor the rapidly evolving situation and plan ahead as necessary. Our campuses will reopen for on-site instruction when it is safe to do so — in coordination with federal, state and local health departments and authorities.”

But there could be as many as 15 different options colleges could take for the fall, according to the online publication Inside Higher Ed, including a normal semester start, moving fall to the spring, only allowing first-year students on campus and remotely teaching everyone else and giving students the choice to attend classes in-person or remotely

How those decisions should be made has even triggered controversy.

The California Faculty Association, the labor union representing 30,000 CSU employees, wants Chancellor Tim White to take on a more significant leadership role as the pandemic continues and include faculty and students in his decisions.

“Faculty want to hear from the chancellor while campus administrations are making fragmented decisions without any input from students and faculty,” CFA President Charles Toombs said. “Decisions and communications have been inconsistent, confusing and full of speculation.”

The association’s members were surprised to read news that Fullerton had planned to cancel on-campus classes this fall and remain virtual. The university, however, has since clarified that it has not made a final decision on the issue.

The faculty group “urges caution and care when discussing plans for the future,” according to the association, adding that it “understands that the COVID-19 crisis is complex. That’s why the CSU response must integrate input from all parties and be driven by data.”

None of the system’s 23 campuses have decided on the fall term. However, CSU Maritime Academy, with an enrollment of just over 1,000 students, received special approval on Friday from Gov. Gavin Newsom to resume in-person instruction this spring to complete the semester. Many of the academy’s classes are conducted on ships.

Responding to the union’s demands to hear from Chancellor White, a CSU spokesman added, “CSU administration takes seriously the notion of shared leadership and will consult with the appropriate members of the CSU community, faculty, staff and students prior to any final decisions. It is important to remember that state and local health officials will play a critical role in our collective path forward.”

Link to article: <https://edsource.org/2020/anxiety-builds-as-california-colleges-consider-how-and-when-to-resume-on-campus-fall-courses/630512>