

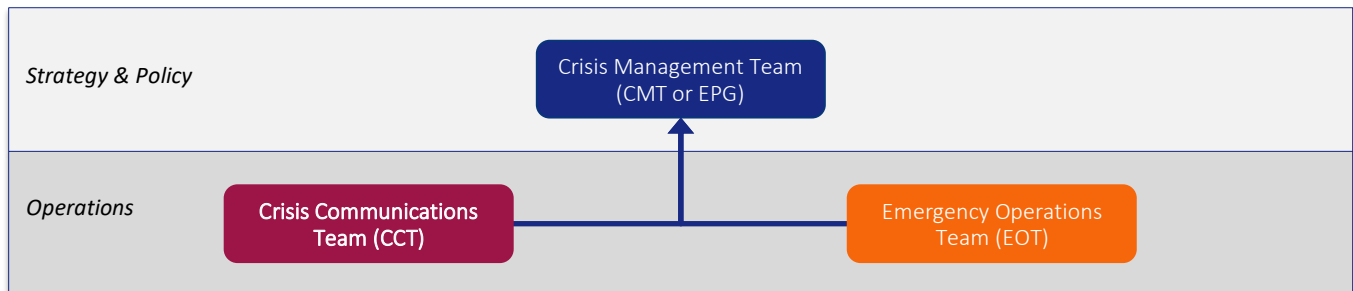
Pandemic Planning

Practical & Strategic Considerations

HIGHER ED ISSUE BRIEF

COVID-19: MOVING BEYOND REACT/RESPOND

One of the fundamental challenges of crisis management is the ability to get ahead—to move beyond a react/respond mode, particularly with a quickly evolving crisis like Covid-19. Key to the ability to get ahead is clear definition of team roles—with the Crisis Management Team (CMT), or Executive Policy Group (EPG), focused on strategic and policy decisions and the Emergency Operations Team (EOT) and Crisis Communications Team (CCT) focused on operationalizing and communicating those decisions, e.g. CMT decision to close all dorms, EOT working out how to support students recover their valuables if they are already home, and CCT communicating those decisions to students, parents, and staff.



Without this clear delineation of roles, it is likely that the following may be occurring at your institution:

- CMT/Leadership bogged down in discussion of logistics and tactical challenges
- Strategic decisions not being made leading to a slow/reactive response.
- Proactive identification of “what’s next” not able to occur, potentially compounding the impact of the institution’s response on its reputation
- Inability to seize potential competitive advantages

Planning Case

A Planning Case is used to define the conceivable “worst probable outcome” or planning case. Asking the questions **Where are we now?** and **Where is this going?** relative to stakeholders, functional areas, and context helps the CMT move beyond a “react-respond” mode to thinking ahead to the context, larger strategy and management of human, financial, legal, and reputational impacts.

Given the fluidity of the situation, contingency planning should include a number of probable scenarios including—remaining closed through the end of the semester, the end of the summer, or even the end of the calendar year.

Key Strategic Issues:

Student Impacts

- Finalizing refund/credit policies related to room and board, fees (i.e. lab) and potentially tuition depending on course, and understanding the total financial impact
- Considering commencement alternatives—cancelling it outright is a decision that seems overly simplistic and does not recognize the significant time/financial investment students have made. A true celebration of graduating students' achievements is a way to strengthen and deepen the bond with students, their families, and the community at large
- Envision ways to ensure “community”—while online coursework is important, it is just one reason why students chose your school. Work to leverage those differences in a virtual environment perhaps through a dedicated you tube channel where your community can tune in to hear from famous alums, learn about little known research, view recorded performances, etc.

Academic Impacts

- Differentiating on the quality of online delivery of courses. Successful models should be shared and built into delivery going forward. Conversely, a poor rollout could detrimentally affect the school's reputation and fundamentally erode the perceived value of a traditional, residential university experience

Operational Impacts

- Assessing viability of summer school programs and alternatives
- Developing a long-term business continuity strategy to ensure the ability to continue to deliver critical infrastructure (buildings, security), services (utilities, standby power, dining, health), functions (payroll, human resources, academic records) and research (lab operations, care of animals etc.)
- Identifying opportunities to support your local community, particularly in small towns where the university or college has a large footprint

Alumni/Development

- Identifying opportunities to meaningfully engage and solicit support from alumni before donation and volunteering fatigue sets in—from activating alums as emotional and financial support network for at-risk (low income, first gen, foster care) students to creating funds and/or working groups to support the schools Covid-19 response effort.

Financial Impacts

- Modeling the following possible scenarios
 - a 10-20% decline in enrollment or deferral of enrollment;
 - loss of revenue associated with sports, cultural events, conference etc.
 - market declines on endowment and implications of withdrawals
- Consider difficult decisions that may need to be made around staffing requirements particularly given deteriorating economic fundamentals which will impact endowment, ability to pay etc.
- Developing an approach if accepted candidates fail to meet the typical May 1st signing deadline

NOTE: Crisis Management Teams (CMT)

Emergency Management Plans (EMP) typically recognize that a group of senior, cross-functional leaders does sometimes need to be involved in response; however, the role of this Executive Policy Group (EPG) tends to be only lightly described and often defaults to an existing leadership team. In most cases this “default team” is simply too large to be effective or may not have the appropriate expertise required to manage the crisis.

Your institution's CMT (or EPG) should not default to the President's direct reports or the Cabinet. Rather, it should be a pre-selected, core team of leaders who have the expertise and authority that is critical for effective response. The CMT needs defined leadership, authority, core membership, specific functional roles/responsibilities, backup, and extended team membership. Members must understand when the team is activated; how information about the full range of negative issues and events is reported and escalated; how the team is expected to function; and, most importantly, that its role is to focus on the strategic impacts and consequences of the issue/event. ([Learn More](#))

OPERATIONAL CHECKLISTS

Coordination:

- Reach out to local and state health officials and request regular briefings—work closely with these officials as you make key decisions
- Share information about student/faculty/staff absenteeism
- Monitor any national information sources i.e. CDC
- Reach out to peer schools and geographically close schools to develop information sharing networks

General Health & Wellness

- Educate community, undertake more rigorous environmental cleaning, provide tissues, antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer in all classrooms, public locations.
- Monitoring & plan for absenteeism (current rule of thumb for COVID-19: 30-40%)
- Establish procedures and issue guidelines on illness (students, faculty, staff) and coming to campus
- Identify resources & make plans (i.e. floor, dorms being renovated) for isolation/quarantine
- Consider how to deal with fraternities/sororities not owned by university—outreach to nationals
- Consider how to handle off-campus students who may become ill
- Be ready and prepare for fear/anxiety, misinformation, and community disruption

Events: Sports/Performing Arts/Speakers/Clubs/Graduation

- Continue to monitor viability of events based on latest guidance, currently no more than 10.
- Consider other options beyond cancelling rescheduling, moving online
- Provide exception guidelines

Remote Instruction: Canvas/Zoom

- Develop guidance for both faculty and students relative to the following:
 - Classes & Exams
 - Group Work
 - Labs/Studios/Workshops
 - Office Hours
 - Comprehensive Exam/Thesis
- Address the need for accommodations due to internet/computer access, different time zones, illness
- Provide information/guidance around FERPA & Storing/Sharing Student Data
- Address IT & technical issues
 - Zoom, Canvas, etc.
 - Computers, internet (consider providing campus resources or funding if necessary)

Human Resources

- Identify critical roles and plan for 30-40% reduction
- Develop guidelines around illness for faculty/staff
- Address sick leave and if local schools are closed
- Ensure that all faculty, staff, RAs, etc. are trained on proper safety procedures
- Address student employment (federal rules have recently been adapted)

Travel: Provide Guidance

- Repatriation of faculty and students working or studying abroad
- Faculty/Staff/Student University Sponsored Travel
- Domestic and international travel guidelines including self-isolation prior to return
- International students who need to return home or return back to the university

Security

- Provide guidelines for wellness checks (ideally as pocket guide for officers and at all security stations) including information on employee safety
- Develop enhanced security plan for high risk buildings/locations to address increased risk to university assets and/or research posed by empty buildings
- Develop procedures to ensure that students/faculty/staff stay quarantined
- Create guidelines for students/faculty/staff to retrieve belongings

IT

- Plan for courses going online
- Consider resources for faculty/students including computers/internet/hotspots
- Anticipate vulnerability, increases in cyber-attacks as more services move online > consider not just attacks on confidential data but also on critical research as systems become overwhelmed

Communications:

Microsite:

Establish a microsite or information page(s)—best practice is to have a “dark site” ready to go for emergencies. Information to include:

- About COVID-19 (or other Pandemic) / Health & Wellness
 - What it is/How it Spreads/Symptoms
 - Staying Healthy
 - What to do if suspected & info about Health Center screening
 - Resources—CDC, Health Center, Counseling, Assistance Programs
- Additional Topics: Classes & Exams, Events, Travel, Athletics, Partial/full campus closure w/specifics for student/staff/faculty, Research, Comment/Question Submission Form

Incoming Phone Inquiries:

As important as managing consistent, outbound communications is the manner in which incoming inquiries are handled. At a time of crisis and significant external scrutiny, stakeholders, including those not affiliated with your school, will try to directly call—any published number, email, and use social media to express their concern or frustration. Direct telephone calls are typically the most challenging to manage effectively and if insufficiently prepared can create stress and anxiety for those responsible to answer these inquiries.

- Prepare basic talking points for front line staff but for the most part, have them drive callers to microsite
- Consider establishing Hotlines for students, faculty/staff and families that has key information

CAMPUS CLOSURE CONSIDERATIONS

As you consider campus closures, keep in mind and communicate your decisions on the following relative to a **Limited Time, Partial, or Full Campus Closure:**

- Residences:
 - Students that need to stay on campus (Low Income, International, First Gen, Food/Housing Insecure/ Foster Care)
 - Consider activating alums for support network for at-risk (low income, first gen, foster care students)—helping to cover travel/living expenses on temporary basis
 - Possibility of self-isolation and/or quarantine
 - Locations where sick/healthy students can be moved if necessary
 - How will you handle privately owned facilities i.e. fraternities? Will students be allowed onto campus to self-isolate?
 - Options for belongs, bikes, cars, etc. and plans for retrieval should return not be allowed

- Support Services—if/when to stop, scale back or modify (Health, Dining, etc.)
 - Consider creative options for delivering services i.e. food delivery, “drive through” health screenings
- Students vs. Staff Attendance
- Student Employment
- Athletics
- Travel
- Research Facilities
- Faculty & Graduate Student Childcare
- **RETURN TO SCHOOL: What specifically will you require to ensure that the community remains safe?**
 - Federal/State/Local health authority approval > social distancing no longer required
 - Travel restrictions lifted
 - Faculty/Staff risk diminished/mitigated
 - Facilities (classrooms, dorms, dining, recreation centers, libraries, labs, etc.) properly cleaned and ready for re-occupancy w/new heightened standards in place to prevent reinfection including access to antibacterial wipes, hand sanitizer, etc.
 - Permissions/restrictions/policies regarding return—including any phased approach—documented and clearly communicated including items above i.e. residences, athletics, travel, research & facilities etc.
 - Plans in place to address any illness that develops
 - Decisions made and processes in place to address reimbursement of room/board fees

TEAM OPERATIONS:

Planning should be undertaken by a Crisis Management Team (CMT) with the support of Emergency Operations and Specialty Teams.

- Team should follow a meet-break-meet process to allow members to take action on assigned items
- All decisions should be documented, and action items formally assigned to specific team members with due dates (times) to ensure accountability
- Initial goal is to establish a tiered plan with specific triggers and corresponding actions—include the specific steps that you will take as well as any necessary policy changes relative to: coordination with local, state, and national health officials; instruction; residences/student affairs; HR; Events; Security and Communications

PANDEMIC PLANNING / COVID-19				
LEVEL	1 HIGH	2 MEDIUM	3 LOW	4 MONITOR
NEAREST LARGE CITY OR 100 MILE RADIUS	# Cases: Actions:	# Cases: Actions	# Cases: Actions	# Cases: 0 Actions
LOCAL CITY/TOWN OR X RADIUS Epidemiologically Relevant Area	# Cases: Actions	# Cases: Actions	# Cases: Actions	# Cases: 0 Actions
CAMPUS	# Cases:	# Cases:	# Cases:	# Cases: 0
ACTION				

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