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Sample Higher Education Demands for Safe Return to In-Person Learning

These demands are largely taken from the great work of the United Faculty of Florida / Florida Education Association, the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the California Teachers Association, all of which actively organize and represent higher education members.[1]

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING[2]

➤ 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 webpage 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 International Association of Counseling Services (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, texts, websites, online learning resources/classrooms, etc.).
- ➤ Conduct mental health assessments or surveys by app or other methods 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.
- ➤ Create spaces on campus for grieving and healing.
- ➤ Bring students on campus early to reacquaint and reconnect them if conditions are safe.
- ➤ Engage student leaders and communications staff to create materials to direct people to the new normal.
- ➤ 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.
- ➤ Allow housing-insecure students and those who cannot return home to stay on campus. Work with local landlords to arrange forgiveness of rent payments for students who leave off-campus housing.
- ➤ Make provisions for feeding food-insecure students.

STUDENT SUCCESS

- ➤ 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.).
- ➤ Waive internet access fee for students.
- ➤ Upscale Student Assistance Programs to include all previous needs as well as pandemic needs. They must be easily found and accessible.
- ➤ Provide increased Americans with Disabilities Act (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 excellent captioning software — and end the reliance on YouTube, Google, and other programs not specific to captioning, as they are not accurate enough and are a disservice to our students.
- ➤ Supply face shields and/or clear masks for American Sign Language ASL interpreters and staff who interact with hearing-impaired students.

- ➤ Provide specific guidance from national accrediting institutions for programs that focus on practicum and/or clinical applications will need to ensure students can complete program requirements.

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

- ➤ Provide extra tutoring services for struggling students.

- ➤ Campus administrations must provide easily accessible resources to assist faculty with the transition to temporary remote teaching.

- ➤ Give students who live in poverty, working students and students of color the support, resources and funds they need to safely stay in school. When campuses reopen, all students should be safe and have access to the same quality of education, including poor, working, Native People and People of Color.

SAFE LEARNING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

- ➤ Preserve higher education as a provider of good, family-supporting jobs by providing PPE and keeping everyone on the payroll.

- ➤ Define health requirement for clearance to return to campus, such as recent negative tests.

- ➤ 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.

- ➤ 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 (should it be extended), or employers should provide extensions either voluntary or through collective bargaining. No negative repercussions will occur 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.

➤ Limit campus access to non-students and non-employees.

➤ Train staff on use and storage of new chemicals, including interactions.

➤ Immediately pass legislation providing access to health insurance for adjunct faculty.

➤ Recognize the importance of maintaining safe learning opportunities for the benefit of the students and communities served by the college or university and its faculty.

➤ Guarantee that all higher education workers are paid, including adjunct and visiting faculty, tutors, students, graduate students, and contracted and per-diem employees.

EDUCATOR RIGHTS

➤ Suspend all evaluations. Otherwise, evaluations must acknowledge the unusual circumstances of this year. No one should be penalized for canceled conferences, work that is suspended for public health reasons, or teaching evaluations that may be adversely affected. Faculty should be assured that these disruptions will not affect their evaluations, tenure, promotion, or contract renewal decisions now or in the future.

➤ Campus administrations must provide easily accessible resources to assist faculty with the transition to temporary remote teaching.

➤ 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.

➤ Faculty should get credit for their additional efforts these semesters as they do the work to create remote teaching and learning systems, including covering other colleagues' work if necessary.

ENDNOTES

1 Florida Education Association feaweb.org/covid19
    Massachusetts Teachers Association massteacher.org/current-initiatives/coronavirus-and-schools
    California Teachers Association cta.org/for-educators/covid19

2 forgeorganizing.org/article/heres-how-we-not-just-reopen-transform-higher-education

MORE INFO/RESOURCES

Navigating COVID-19 Pandemic EducatingThroughCrisis.org

Bargaining for the Common Good nea.org/bcg or BargainingForTheCommonGood.org

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