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Campus Safety PARTNER SERIES



**RESPONDING TO
THE CORONAVIRUS:
HOW COLLEGES ARE
PREPARING FOR
SPRING 2021**





RESPONDING TO THE CORONAVIRUS: HOW COLLEGES ARE PREPARING FOR SPRING 2021

COVID-19 has drastically altered the 2020/2021 academic year. Here's how institutions of higher education are planning for the Spring term.

As the U.S. surpasses 270,000 deaths from COVID-19, college campuses are now in the process of planning for Spring 2021.

Much like Fall 2020, there are a whole host of knowns and unknowns that U.S. institutions must take into consideration when creating plans for the next semester or quarter. What will the COVID-19 infection rates be at their location? When will vaccines be widely available, and how will they be administered? And with the polarized political landscape our nation is currently facing, how will that affect college and university attempts to respond to outbreaks and COVID-related security issues?

These challenges and many others will need to be considered, and campuses will need to develop plans with contingencies that can be quickly implemented.

What Schools Learned from the Fall Semester

Before the Fall 2020 semester began, some universities or systems, such as the California State University system, opted for online-only classes. Many others adopted some variation of a hybrid-approach, with some classes being held in-person and some online. And there were some schools that held most of their classes in person.

Almost immediately after the start of the 2020/2021 academic year, a large number of colleges that held in-person classes experienced outbreaks. Many switched to distance learning either temporarily or for the rest of the fall term. By late September, more than 75% of the nation's coronavirus hotspots were in college towns, reported *USA Today*. When outbreaks occurred, some colleges asked everyone living on or near campus to quarantine for two weeks.

Keeping track of all the students who test positive for the coronavirus has been a logistical nightmare. KHN reports that some students have listed their home addresses rather than their college residences on their COVID-19 testing forms, which slowed contact tracing efforts by colleges and local public health departments across state and county lines. Additionally, some students got tested off campus or when they went home for the weekend, which further complicated campus contact tracing efforts.

What makes tracking college student infections even more challenging is the fact that they often don't answer phone calls from numbers they don't recognize.

Additionally, the lack of an interconnected coronavirus tracking system has made contact tracing difficult. Colleges have been setting up their own contact tracing centers to supplement overstretched local and state health departments. (Article continues on next page.)

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Some Schools Have Had Success Combatting COVID

It's important to note that although many colleges have experienced significant issues brought on by the pandemic, some campuses have been successful at containing the virus. An analysis by *National Geographic* found that 1,215 U.S. institutions of higher education had fewer than 100 reported cases as of October 22. Loyola Marymount University enrolls about 9,300 students but only reported one case. Sarah Lawrence College, which has an enrollment of around 1,400, reported only three cases.

The majority of colleges that have been able to contain the virus have created their own public health infrastructures, sharing cohesive public health messaging with their

communities and implementing rigid COVID-19 testing.

A reduction in the number of students living on campus is another helpful move that has kept infections at bay. Only 35% of Sarah Lawrence's undergraduate student body is living on campus this year, compared to 84% last year. Each dorm room houses only one student, and several rooms have been kept vacant for students who need to quarantine.

Another factor that helped some institutions of higher education keep COVID-19 under control was the fact that people from the surrounding community couldn't freely go on to their campuses.

Campuses Revise Approaches to Thanksgiving, Spring Breaks

At the beginning of the academic year, many U.S. institutions of higher education that held in-person classes planned to conclude on-campus classes at Thanksgiving break. This allowed students to return home until the beginning of the spring term. Additionally, some fall graduation ceremonies were moved online.

For the beginning of 2021, some universities say they will continue distance learning, reports *EdScoop*. As of the writing of this paper, some of them include George Washington University, the University of Southern California, the Northern Virginia Community College system and the California State University system. Students at other campuses, such as the University of California at Berkeley, Wichita State and Carnegie Mellon, can choose to go fully online or hybrid.

Florida State, Ohio State, the University of Tennessee, Baylor, Texas Christian, Kansas State, the University of Kentucky, Iowa State, Purdue, the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the University of Iowa, the University of Florida, the University of Northern Iowa and Davidson College are cancelling spring break to limit student travel.

Technology Can Improve Effectiveness of Contact Tracing Efforts

Despite the challenges universities and public health departments are having with contact tracing, experts say our nation must continue to track infections. The American College Health Association recommends active testing, contact tracing and other public health measures by universities to keep COVID rates among students as low as possible.

Fortunately, there are contact tracing technologies on the market today that can help colleges with this task. Some mobile apps can be leveraged to:

- › Conduct daily surveys with students, faculty and staff to assess their health status through symptom checks and provide evidence of verification
- › Gain a full assessment and understanding of campus risk factors through wellness checks
- › Proactively notify those who may have been exposed based on established proximity and duration thresholds with guidance
- › Provide assistance and relevant information to those who have tested positive for the coronavirus

Another benefit of apps is they can help campuses comply with Clery Act guidelines regarding timely warnings and incident reporting. (Article continues on page 5.)

CAMPUSES WILL NEED TO DEVELOP PLANS WITH CONTINGENCIES THAT CAN BE QUICKLY IMPLEMENTED.

DU's Tracing App Is Key to Keeping COVID-19 Under Control

Before the start of Fall 2020, the University of Denver (DU) adopted Everbridge's COVID-19 Shield software to assist campus officials with contact tracing, proximity monitoring and wellness checks. Nearly three out of four of its students, faculty and staff members use the app to help the school monitor and slow the spread of the coronavirus.

So far, the approach has proven successful, reports 5280.com. Unlike many other college campuses, DU hasn't experienced a significant outbreak. As of November 18, only 146 students and campus staff members tested positive for COVID-19 in the previous week.

"We are right now running at about 96 hours ahead of the city in terms of being able to identify and quarantine folks," Sarah Watamura, professor and chair of the Department of Psychology and DU's COVID-19 response coordinator told 5280.com.

As a result, the school was able to provide in-per-

son classes until November 16. DU switched to distance learning after November 16 because the state of Colorado experienced a significant surge in cases and hospitalizations.

Everbridge's app enables DU to automatically conduct campus contact-tracing and wellness checks. Twice a day, the app sends push notifications that remind users to complete symptom checks. It then let's DU officials know if there are possible exposures reported on the questionnaires.

Additionally, if a student, faculty member or other employee stands for 15 minutes or longer within six feet of someone who has tested positive, campus officials are notified.

Everbridge has addressed privacy concerns with the app by using Bluetooth tokens that are randomized and don't contain personal information.

Apps Enable Quick Dissemination of Critical Information

If there is one constant we've experienced with the pandemic, it's that what we know about it is constantly changing. For example, studies have recently found that aerosols and droplets with virus-containing respiratory secretions are much more likely to transmit COVID-19 than if the virus is just on a surface. This means that campuses need to take a closer look at their indoor air ventilation strategies and perhaps focus less on the deep cleaning of high-touch areas.

These and other changes in our understanding of how the coronavirus is spread, as well as the recent spikes in infections and the upcoming rollout of vaccines, mean campuses need to be able to pivot their approaches to virus mitigation quickly. Unfortunately, many institutions of higher education only put their operations plans and COVID-mitigation plans in binders or some other type of hard copy. This makes it difficult for colleges to implement their plans because they can't be shared in the field.

However, digitizing their plans with the help of a crisis management app helps campuses quickly disseminate them to staff members' mobile phones, laptops and other mobile devices. And, if the plans need to be revised due to changing circumstances or new information, change notifications can be quickly disseminated as well.

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Critical Event Management

PLATFORM



Some crisis management apps can even be customized to address an institution's specific needs. These solutions have the ability to add custom forms so schools can collect the exact information they need on site, in the format of their choosing. So, if a COVID case is discovered, campus officials can be confident that mitigation steps, such as isolation, cleaning and notification, actually happen.

Apps can also help with Clery Act compliance, auto-generating Campus Security Authority (CSA) incident reports.

The Right Tools Can Help Save Lives

COVID-19 is the biggest public health challenge college campuses and our nation have experienced in more than a century, and we don't know how the pandemic will play out over the next year.

That said, we do know that effective contact tracing and emergency management programs can save lives. We also know that the efficacy of those programs can be augmented with the right technology apps.

Campuses that do their homework and adopt the right tools will be in a better position to keep their communities safe during these trying times.



For more information, visit [Everbridge.com](https://www.everbridge.com).

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