



## **Draft Executive Summary COVID-19 Campus Planning Committee**

As the University at Buffalo prepares for the Fall 2020 semester and beyond, it does so with challenges never before experienced. Even so, the COVID-19 Campus Planning Committee is confident UB will fulfill its mission.<sup>1</sup> Excellence in the achievement of this mission serves as a context for all of our COVID-19 planning.

The charge for the Campus Planning Committee (23 members) called for us to coordinate the work of five separate subcommittees (137 members) to include an Academic Continuity, Retention, and Completion; Faculty and Graduate Professional Research Continuity; Student Experience and Wellness; Faculty and Staff; and Operations subcommittee. Our joint work is to inform and propose high-level recommendations on how to operationalize the university within the scenarios defined by executive leadership – “return to normal – modified in-person – fully remote.” We were tasked with doing this, addressing short-term planning (Stage 1: Summer and Fall 2020 semesters) and long-term planning (Stage 2: Spring 2021 semester and beyond). We do this work as part of a larger set of groups including a Strategic Financial Management Advisory Group, a Screening, Testing, and Contact Tracing Protocol, and an Executive Leadership Group.

The work presents a consensus on core priorities and high-level recommendations relevant to all the task groups. It also outlines a way to plan with assumptions that will enable multiple possible scenarios to be effectively implemented. The executive summary reports on an extensive slide deck documenting the basic takeaways from the COVID-19 Campus Planning Committee. Supplemental work in communications and IT planning is provided in the appendices to the slide deck. All the work is intended to inform a Strategic Financial Management Advisory Group; a Screening, Testing, and Contact Tracing Protocol Committee; and an Executive Leadership Committee. In all, a total of 180 faculty, staff, and students are engaged, not including the various working committees under the VP/CIO and the VP for University Communications.

While the work of the Committee will continue in mid-June by taking up Stage 2 – long-term planning – the work already started as part of Stage 1 will continue to mature; there are still unanswered questions and continued work to do to enable success in the Fall of 2020 and Spring of 2021.

## Summary

### *Context and Method*

The Committee addressed the “in-person modified” scenario in detail believing that it was most inclusive and complex, affording the ability to flexibly pivot to either of the other two scenarios. Preparation for all variations of scenario would be enabled best by understanding how to implement delivering the in-person-modified condition. Absent timely decisions, the ability to implement several aspects of the modified on-campus experience becomes increasingly challenged due to required lead times for procurement, staffing, course preparation, training, the logistics of course scheduling and registration, and other prerequisites to success. Hence there is a general feeling that decisions made “as soon as possible” would reduce the cost and complexity while facilitating the very ability to deliver the mission at the beginning of the fall semester.

### *Core principles shared across sub-committees*

The committee and sub-committees shared common ground on six key principles.

- **Principle #1: A Culture of Health and Safety** - Build a strong, internalized, evidence-based, and accountable culture of health and safety among the UB community, protecting all of the UB faculty, staff, students, and visitors as well as the communities that host them.
- **Principle #2: Flexibility** - Prepare all aspects of campus academic programs, research, student life, faculty and staff wellbeing, and campus operations to be as flexible and elastic as possible within curricular, accreditation, and licensure requirements to address the unpredictable course of the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - **Return to “Normal”**: Always prepared for the full return of the entire UB community to campus.
  - **Modified-In-Person**: Always prepared to utilize the campus experience where we can.
  - **Fully Remote**: Always prepared to support the mission off-campus.
- **Principle #3: Equity and Inclusion** - Implement fair and transparent processes that meet the needs of special populations and encourage management and adjustment of HR and ER policies, within the university’s ability, to deal with the consequences of actions taken in response to the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Principle #4: Financial Health** - Be mindful of the financial health of the University to continue to deliver excellence in our mission over the short and long term.
- **Principle #5: Communications** - Use clear and consistent communication strategies as part of the larger effort to create a culture of care, compassion, and community.

- **Principle #6: We Are A Place-Based Education Campus** - Plan for off-campus operations even as we plan for value-added, in-person engagements according to the protocols for safety and health on campus.

### *Recommendations*

Recommendations put forth by the Committee are made to provide broad guidelines that can be shaped to accommodate the needs of individual units and areas across campus. A “one size fits all” set of blanket recommendations were not deemed ideal, nor would that meet the objectives for the Committee for high-level recommendations. The recommendations that arise from the subcommittees embody the following framework:

- **Guidelines** - *Put into place a clear set of guidelines and evidence-based protocols for health and safety for the entire university community with a clear path for implementation and compliance.*
- **Flexibility** - *Create a flexible academic framework and timelines that help assure excellence in our mission delivery.*
- **A Modified In-Person Operation (Fall)** - *Operate as modified in-person for Fall 2020 if allowable as public policy.*

### **Subcommittee summaries**

#### **Academic Continuity, Retention and Completion Subcommittee**

Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, instruction has continued remotely and, to a much lesser degree, in-person when necessary. During this period, UB’s primary goal has been to maintain academic excellence in the context of public health guidelines issued by New York State and the Erie County Department of Health. The Academic Continuity subcommittee recommends maintaining this goal through the COVID-19 pandemic. No one can predict with certainty the future vicissitudes of the pandemic. However, the Academic Continuity subcommittee recommends planning for modified in-person instruction for the start of the Fall 2020 semester as shelter-in-place restrictions are lifted, while also planning to facilitate a return to fully remote instruction for undetermined periods if a spike in infection rates leads New York State and/or the Erie County Department of Health to issue stricter public health measures.

The amount of in-person instruction possible during the Fall will be determined by classroom availability given the need for 6 feet of physical distancing, masks, PPE, and other health considerations. Currently, capacity is estimated at approximately 25% of the typical seating capacity. Capacity can be slightly increased by expanding peak hours to include evenings and weekends as well as repurposing select spaces for instructional use. Additional capacity can be added through other measures implemented at the course level (for example, flipped classes). As density guidelines are relaxed, potentially over the Fall semester and into Spring 2021, seating capacity may be increased.

Given that a limited number of classes can be seated, the Academic Continuity subcommittee recommends that access to classrooms be determined by critical curricular goals (labs, clinical experiential learning, classes involving in-person, practical, performance, and research experiences, etc.) and university goals (research requiring in-person components, such as graduate courses, and courses that contribute to retention and student experiences, such as first-year seminars and small group instruction). Particular courses that will be taught in-person, partially in-person, or fully remote should be determined through a distributed decision-making approach in which central administration sets guidelines and parameters, and academic units determine, within those guidelines, instructional modality and how they utilize spaces in which courses are scheduled.

Additional recommendations for Fall 2020 include ensuring best practices and training in educational technology for faculty and TAs, reviewing academic policy to align with modified in-person instruction, reviewing curriculum to ensure compliance with curricular requirements (university, SUNY, SED, and accrediting/licensing agencies), planning for academic support including measures to maintain academic integrity and supporting students' access to appropriate technology in a modified in-person environment, and upgrading classrooms as needed to ensure the ability to deliver synchronous online instruction. These should begin immediately.

### **Faculty and Staff**

The health, safety, and wellbeing of our faculty and staff are of paramount importance to decision-making about our future. We are committed to ensuring that faculty and staff receive protection against contracting the virus to allow them to carry on their work with the security of knowing that the university will put safety above all else. We are committed to supporting our faculty and staff through flexible work schedules as we are able, efforts to reduce density, support for remote working options, and extension to the Tenure Clock Stop policy. We are building strategies to communicate with faculty and staff on multiple platforms to guide best practices for remaining healthy, guidelines for department chairs and supervisors to assist in individual and team interactions, as well as opportunities to provide feedback and additional suggestions. During this time, we will support faculty and staff development with university-wide efforts to enhance their skills in the classroom, in their leadership, and their overall effectiveness. We recognize that difficult financial decisions may need to be made as we adjust to this crisis, but we will take aggressive steps to treat all faculty and staff equitably, with sensitivity and respect.

### **Faculty and Graduate Professional Research Continuity Subcommittee**

Returning to research and scholarly activity: Much research and scholarly activity have continued remotely, and the university's research support, administration, and compliance infrastructure have been operating at 100% capacity remotely. We are implementing a multi-staged approach to Research Ramp-up on campus. We will allow labs and facilities to resume in-person activities at a lower capacity and following social distancing protocols, but continue to require that work, which can be done remotely, continue to be done remotely. PIs have been given planning and guiding documents to assist them in completing their own Laboratory Operations Plans for the approval of their Department Chair and Associate Dean for Research.

Consideration should be given to academic programs, excluding Spring 2020 from graduate student time-to-degree calculations and extending funding if resources permit.

### **Student Experience and Wellness**

#### *Student Experience*

As we work toward coming back to campus safely in the Fall, we are innovating every part of the UB student experience—from the academic calendar to residential living—to provide students the best and safest possible configuration of on-campus and high-quality remote learning. We encourage students to keep their long-term goals in front of them during this unprecedented time. In support of that ideal, we will continue to produce opportunities for students that create experiences that enhance student learning and personal growth. We are already facilitating a virtual summer orientation program for new students, encouraging student organizations to re-engage, and providing remote career services, advising, and wellness programs and counseling sessions.

There will be necessary changes in how our spaces are configured and classes are delivered, as well as in the many campus activities that make UB so enriching. We will be resilient and adapt to this new reality as we foster a sense of community and belonging for all.

#### *Campus Living & Dining*

As we plan for a return to campus, the US Centers for Disease Control's Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education inform our work. Our housing remains open and we have increased disinfection of public areas and added new physical distancing protocols across housing and dining. We will determine appropriate safety precautions for the residence halls using evidence-based, public health protocols for the control of infectious disease, considering issues such as the density of the student population, restroom/shower facilities, cleaning protocols, ventilation, etc. We also will consider student mental health, and the health ramifications of limiting residence hall density as students not accommodated by residential living will instead be living in off-campus housing that may observe different safety protocols than is available in the university's residence halls. We will schedule appointments for early check-in for individual move-in dates and times to help achieve physical distancing. On-campus dining services will be open to students, faculty, and staff. Seating in dining halls will be reduced to promote physical distancing, and we will expand to-go offerings. Also, mobile food ordering and touchless pay options will be offered throughout campus.

### **Operations Subcommittee**

We are preparing our campus operations to provide a healthy and safe learning environment for our University community. We expect to put in place new policies and practices that may include social distancing; limiting the number of people in offices, classrooms, residence halls, and labs; stringent sanitation measures; the use of face coverings or other personal protective equipment, and other public health requirements and guidelines.

The Operations group is prioritizing our academic mission and high-quality research within the context of social distancing. Accordingly, we plan to minimize the physical presence of staff to

decrease density and focus on providing adequate space for faculty and staff to social distance. This will require the campus to be innovative and agile in the coming months so that we can continue to provide University services such as Library Services, Campus Dining, Transportation, Residential Services, and Technology.

While the health and safety of the UB community are paramount, the Operations group will consider the financial health of the institution. The duration of this crisis is unclear and UB must be mindful to make decisions that will position us to weather the crisis intact. Leadership will be advised of resource opportunities, risks, and financial constraints to support informed decision-making.

Throughout this process, we will maintain a culture of transparency and teamwork. As the Operations team for the University, we are confident that we can provide the support that the UB community needs during this difficult time.

### **Technology Support**

The University at Buffalo is committed to delivering modern and innovative instructional technology solutions for both faculty and student success. During the rapid transition to on-line instruction in March 2020, the greater UBIT community rallied around the implementation, training, and support of the various technologies needed for Spring semester success. As the University turned its strategic focus to Fall 2020 and beyond, these IT professionals once again aligned together with faculty and academic affairs to work with the Provost's committees to create high-quality recommendations for an anticipated hybrid/hyflex instructional environment.

To accomplish this, the VPCIO commissioned two campus-wide IT committees to provide strategic guidance for Fall 2020:

***Online Instructional Technology Solutions Committee*** – To enhance the current range of synchronous and asynchronous technologies as well as expand training services to better equip faculty and instructors for quality teaching

***Hybrid Classroom Solutions Committee*** - To evaluate several synchronous scenario-based needs and recommend appropriate cost-conscious technology solutions for meeting those needs

These committees totaled almost 60 members representing central and distributed IT units, Academic Affairs, Libraries, CEI, and Faculty. The conclusions are outlined in the attached presentation summary and details available in the two committee's final reports.

In summary, the IT recommendations align with the Priority Recommendations above of a modified in-person and flexible instructional delivery scenario. These include fully-outfitting 50+ central classrooms for hybrid/hyflex instruction, the creation of 100 portable "webcam" systems, and the design/assembly of 50 mobile carts for optimal on-line/in-person instructional capabilities.

These IT committees as well as the Provost Committees also recognized the necessity of insuring students and faculty could operate both locally as well as at a distance in this hybrid

environment. This includes the availability of both computer and broadband Internet equipment which meets minimally acceptable capability.

The greater UBIT community stands ready to collaborate with our faculty and administration in meeting the challenges of this unprecedented time.

### ***Communications Support***

#### **Strategic communications plan: In support of UB's decision for the new academic year and the return of key stakeholders to UB's campuses**

To instill confidence in UB's plans for the new academic year and its ability to protect students, faculty, staff, and visitors as they return to the campus and participate in programs of education and research, University Communications will implement a university-wide communications plan to engage key stakeholders whose participation in, and support of, UB's mission is essential to the university's success.

The communications plan will be implemented under the theme, "*UB Forward: The university's plans in response to COVID-19*," and will be executed in three stages. Stage 1: Planning and Coordination – June 1 through mid-June; providing updates on UB's planning process and progress; preparation of messaging and content with internal partners. Stage 2: Announcing UB's Decision for the New Academic Year-end of June through early July; implementing a carefully coordinated announcement of UB's plan for the new academic year, providing concise, actionable information to stakeholders with an emphasis on academic excellence and health and safety. Stage 3: Preparing Key Stakeholders for the Fall Semester – July through fall semester; weekly updates on UB preparations and plans, directing stakeholders to authoritative information, and providing additional direction on academic planning and health and safety measures.

#### *Topline messages:*

- The health and safety of the UB community is our utmost priority.
- UB is implementing a comprehensive and flexible plan for the 2020-21 academic year.
- Our goal is to deliver the best educational, research, and student support programs possible while protecting the health and safety of the university community.
- As we implement the plan, UB will provide regular updates to our stakeholders and monitor the progress of the pandemic.
- Continually seek feedback from the UB community.

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#### **Mission**

The University at Buffalo is a diverse, inclusive scholarly community dedicated to bringing the benefits of our research, scholarship, creative activities and educational excellence to local and global communities in ways that impact and positively change the world.

We view the three traditional pillars of the public higher education mission—research, education and service—as interdependent endeavors that continually enrich and inform each other. Groundbreaking research, transformative educational experiences and deeply engaged service to our communities define the University at Buffalo's mission as a premier, research-intensive public university.

#### **Vision**

Building on the existing strong foundation of academic excellence, knowledge and understanding, the University at Buffalo will advance into the nation's Top 25 public research universities, thereby expanding the scope of our reach and strengthening UB's world-wide impact.