

# STAFF AND FACULTY INPUT ON FALL 2020 PLANNING [SUMMARY REPORT]

Prepared by the Academic Planning Task Force

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## **Executive Summary**

This document provides feedback gathered from a Google Form sent by Interim President Michael Bernstein, which asked faculty and staff to provide input on considerations for Fall planning. Over 150 individuals responded. Key responses, which were coded and analyzed, are summarized here and include:

- Health and Safety Considerations
- Academic Considerations
- Accessibility and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Considerations
- Technology Considerations

We summarize with six recommendations

## **Introduction**

On Monday, May 11, 2020, Interim President Michael Bernstein sent a message to all faculty and staff regarding our considerations for Fall planning. He outlined the following as our initial guiding principles for this process:

- The health and well-being of our community;
- Our pursuit of adequate, reliable testing for the COVID-19 virus and its antibodies;
- The establishment of effective social distancing protocols;
- Continued excellence in education, research, scholarship, and art-making;
- The promotion of an accessible academic environment for everyone;
- The maintenance of success and upward social mobility of our students
- An ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Honoring shared governance practices;
- The cultivation of a vibrant and nurturing institutional culture;
- The challenges of ensuring staff, faculty, and student access to safe workspaces and residence halls, and to necessary information technology;
- The obligation of facilitating the continued success of Stony Brook University Hospital and of Stony Brook Medicine in serving all our patients;
- The interruptions, occasioned by the emergency, in our scholarship, research, and art-making missions – and the imperatives of recovering from them;

- The need to reconfigure our student success and retention efforts in light of social distancing practices;
- The increased demand for instructional training and support in a new and rapidly evolving teaching environment;
- The continuing impact of the pandemic on enrollment trends and on course modalities;
- The potential obstacles now facing our international students with respect to visa processing and travel;
- The financial and budgetary implications of our plans, especially given the fact that revenues are, and will continue to be, considerably reduced and costs are high and rising;
- The expectation that many of our facilities will be physically reconfigured in conformity with infection control protocols;
- The requirement that all our decisions be aligned with policy guidance from SUNY and Executive Orders from the Governor of the State of New York.

His communication also called for additional feedback from the broader community. The purpose of this exercise is to collect ideas that might have previously been overlooked, to develop a deeper understanding of the campus climate, and to cultivate a culture of collaboration and open discussion. This report synthesizes key findings and themes of the responses.

### **Methodology and Analysis**

All faculty and staff were invited to answer the following two questions via Google Form:

1. What additional factors do you recommend we consider as we approach Fall planning?
2. Are there other thoughts or comments you wish to share?

Participants were only asked to provide their University affiliation; additional identifying information was not requested to encourage candor in the responses. At the time of drafting this report, 148 people answered via the form and an additional three people emailed President Bernstein directly. After an analysis of all the responses, we organized responses into codes that were developed through the emergent themes.

## **Limitations**

Since participants volunteered to provide feedback, self-selection bias needs to be considered when evaluating this information. More faculty responded than staff, which could indicate that this analysis more accurately reflects the faculty experience. While this form was only sent to faculty and staff directly, about 30 students (including some incoming students) participated. The tone and nature of these responses dramatically contrasted those of the faculty and staff, suggesting a very different perspective on this issue. Due to the qualitative nature of this feedback, it is important not to generalize these findings but rather to approach them as a range of perspectives and ideas that can add nuance to our understanding of how different people are experiencing and expressing their concerns about academic planning during the COVID-19 crisis.

## **Findings**

Many of the responses underscore the points outlined in the initial stated principles, with a resounding emphasis placed on the health and safety of the campus community. While respondents have strong opinions about what the Fall semester should look like, their perceptions of the best solution vary. Their responses also offer more depth to these considerations, especially with respect to accessibility, learning environments, and access to technology.

### **Health and Safety Considerations**

The fear of returning to campus is palpable for faculty and staff. Respondents express concern not only for themselves, but also for those in high-risk groups. Faculty and staff crave reassurance that their work environment will be safe and properly equipped with resources, including adequate testing services and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Recurring feedback includes:

- Concerns about the mental health of students, faculty, and staff in addition to the physical health;
- Concerns about exposure risks for those who rely on mass transit to get to campus;

- Questions regarding whether there will be repercussions for those who do not adhere to social distancing protocol;
- Concerns about sanitation levels of the facilities, especially shared spaces, and our ability to keep them properly cleaned;
  - There is a perception that we do not have enough custodial staff.
  - There were a couple of specific mentions about the conditions of the buildings' HVAC systems.
- Questions regarding the logistics of social distancing in small office and class spaces; and
- Suggestions to conduct tracing on campus.

Below are some selected responses that illustrate key feedback:

*There are some mental health considerations for returning to work, I'm sure I'm not the only one who has had nightmares about going back too soon. The amount of anxiety that many of us have been experiencing, trying to balance working, homeschooling, building different routines and structure to manage everything with very little downtime is real.*

*You **\*have\*** to take into account the fact that hundreds of students, staff, and faculty commute to campus on public transportation (both the MTA in the city, to get to the train, and then the LIRR to get out to SB), and not only need to contend with the safety of public transportation for themselves and their families, but are also potentially bringing the virus to campus.*

*The physical and mental health of faculty, staff and students need to be included in the plan. As the equivalent of a small city we will need to consider our own contact tracing, COVID testing, antibody testing and addressing PTSD from social isolation and fears of COVID. Knowing the rate of COVID on campus we need emergency plans for the uptick in cases and a better way of communicating with the entire campus rapidly as conditions on campus change. These changes will help us into the future as well.*

*My staff are concerned that we don't have enough PPE for front-line service staff and student workers. Will University provide plexiglass, masks, gloves, tape to mark our floors for distancing? Or will departments have to order their own? Also, there is a high concern about custodial cleaning protocols. We've had to put in a FixIT ticket nearly every week for the one location on West Campus that is open. This does not foster any confidence in my staff who work there every day. The third factor is student/faculty/staff compliance on mask requirement. We have seen fluctuation, between 40 to 80% compliance in our public spaces. I am also concerned about further deterioration of compliance when the weather gets warmer. That also does not give us much confidence about having public spaces open.*

*HVAC system upgrades to ALL buildings. Some of the buildings are incredibly old like Harriman Hall, and I worry that the virus will be particularly likely to spread in buildings which do not have adequate circulation. (For example, in some rooms in Harriman, the windows do not open at all). I worry about the health implications of processing hundreds of students through these classrooms, even if we follow appropriate social distancing recommendations.*

### **Academic Considerations**

Although there is consensus that health and safety need to remain our highest priority, there is less uniformity over the best approach for instructional delivery in the Fall. Some share that the online format went better than expected in the Spring, with many open to continuing online instruction in the Fall. Some encourage polling faculty on their preference to teach in person or online. Others suggest introducing a hybrid schedule for the Fall. A number feel strongly that online instruction is an inferior substitute for face-to-face interaction. Some suggest providing students flexibility to choose whether to attend in person, and others emphasize students' interest in having most of their classes either online or in person, not a combination. Recurring feedback includes:

- The promotion of academic integrity, especially with respect to testing;

- There were also comments about the negative culture surrounding faculty mistrust of students due to accusations of cheating.
- Concerns about having enough time to prepare for online instruction;
- Interest in developing some in-person elements for online classes; and
- Desires to ensure the continued academic success of our students.

Below are selected responses that illustrate key feedback:

*How will instructors have the time to prepare flexible courses to deal with various possible teaching situations in the fall if decisions are made late and if other demands are placed on them in terms of training?*

*Ensuring cohesion, from the point of view of a student, to optimize the likelihood that they will remain enrolled. If we're unable to house a good number of them, a student would probably prefer a fully online schedule, rather than 4 classes online + 1 that's in person (especially those whose permanent home is further from campus). We need to bring together the ideas of the Deans and reconcile differences, rather than having different setups by unit and program (for undergrads, specifically, since they take classes in multiple units).*

*It might be helpful to ask faculty directly if they would prefer to teach specific fall courses online or on campus if at all possible. Faculty may feel that the instructional needs of some courses are well met online, while for other courses students need to be live in the classroom. It could be smart to prioritize the courses that faculty most want and need to deliver on campus, rather than to make blanket rules based on class size.*

*This is a great time to modernize the campus to meet the needs of transfer students, non-traditional students and students who work full time creating more accessible and flexible courses, more online offerings and more choices and increase the flexibility for employees.*

*I also worry about what a strictly online offering would do to one of most justly cherished accomplishments: Steadily rising graduation rates. Myself and some of my colleagues have struggled to keep students focused and on track to successfully complete courses this semester. This experience has taught me that something important about the classroom. Having to show up in a class enforces a discipline and seriousness. It helps drive students to hold it together to succeed.*

*While a powerful supplemental tool, online learning is no substitute for the classroom and campus experience. I have a hard time imagining students and parents willing to pay the same price for a strictly online experience. Why should they, when there are cheaper alternatives already well established? Indeed, during my 13 years here, students and parents have long told me what they value most about SBU is the campus experience. Classes are a distant second, I'm afraid. We are already seeing storm clouds forming about the resistance to strictly online teaching as wealthier schools face suits over refunds.*

*I just completed a final long class session with my students and we had time to discuss how they felt about online. (One of the students did a paper on online education that she started before we went online.) They are pretty miserable. They miss school, miss having access to professors in person, and miss being physically around other students. They absolutely hate the online exam systems put in place to keep them from cheating, which as they described are a pitch-perfect Foucaultian nightmare. I don't blame the school for trying to stop cheating, but one student said her TA watches her on Zoom while she takes the exam. Another says there is an AI system in place that decides they are cheating from their facial/body language and they are afraid to look down or have facial expressions (!!!) Again, this is hard for large classes to handle undoubtedly, but I am afraid we will lose students if they are forced to use these exam systems for an extended period of time. They have also said that the tests are harder (to eliminate cheating) and*



*that this is draining and difficult for them, and they do not feel like they are learning from it so effectively.*

### **Accessibility Considerations**

Several comments were made about fostering accessible environments for students, faculty, and staff. Below are selected responses that illustrate key feedback:

*Time-vectors & physical requirements for students, especially those with special needs, when it comes to traversing the campus amid social distancing and restrictions placed on academic halls.*

*I worry that we will not go remote in the fall. As an immuno-compromised junior faculty member, I worry about the repercussions of some faculty requesting to teach online only, and that being seen as an attempt to dodge teaching on campus. Without a blanket policy, we risk forcing those with disabilities and immunity issues to communicate personal information to our respective departments that could potentially put us at a disadvantage when it comes to review.*

*As all these committees are being developed it would be important to have a representative who can speak to the accessibility concerns to help develop equal access.*

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Considerations**

One of the more nuanced themes to emerge from the feedback is the perception of inequities in home learning environments. The quality of technology access varies dramatically across the student body, and quiet workspaces are not available in all households. Some of the student respondents shared the challenges of learning remotely and requested the opportunity to have campus housing. With respect to DEI, there is concern for microaggressions occurring on campus toward our Asian and Asian American communities. Below are selected responses that illustrate key feedback:

*A second set of undergraduates would prefer to continue their classes online (these tend to include those with good technology, comfortable spaces, and economic means). As social scientists, we know that online learning can be done successfully with strong and privileged students, but that economically challenged and struggling students are disproportionately disadvantaged.*

*I have also discovered that students face a surprising number of challenges at home. Among them iffy Zoom connections, a lack of adequate WiFi (increasingly because parents can't pay the bill) and lack of privacy to study and produce assignments. Some of our students even lack adequate computers to use school software.*

*As a student, I hope you let us back onto campus. For many of us, including myself, do not have the luxury to have a quiet space in their homes as many other people live in there. Because of Covid-19 there is no other place to go because everything is closed. It is mentally exhausting having classes online and having professor who obviously do not understand how difficult it is for the students, especially when they make the classes harder.*

### **Return to Work Considerations**

Several employees share that they have successfully navigated the remote working environment and do not want to return to campus yet, especially for the sake of maintaining low campus density. People are primarily worried about childcare issues once a transition back to work begins. Below are selected responses that illustrate key feedback:

*Working from home, I find that I am doing the exact same thing that I was doing in the office. I would even say I am more productive. I do not have kids at home, so it might be easier for me to say than other people. But in all seriousness, if staff is able to do the same thing at home that they would normally be doing in the office, would it be possible to consider working from home a few days a week when all of this settles down? The only real difference is not having in-person meetings. But even via Zoom, the*

*conversations are still the same as if they were to be had in the office. I guess the point of this paragraph is that I think it would be a good idea to at least consider the idea of working from home permanently, or even a few days week. It is not worth it to risk someone's health when they can be doing the same thing in the safety of their home.*

*It's most crucial to do all you can to provide students with the education they're paying for - whether it be in person or online. If there are considerations to re-open, their needs should be considered first (meaning, if they are brought back to campus, it would be safer for all if only staff who need to be on campus to assist should be there). Also, if researchers need to be in their labs and offices, that is also a priority. For those of us who have been working remotely for the past two months and can continue to do that effectively, we shouldn't be brought back into the mix on campus until we are all guaranteed a lower risk factor, which may not come until a vaccine is in hand.*

*Many of the university members (faculty, staff, students) are parents of young children and they face additional challenges to juggle the increased demands of both work and child care. If the university opens while no child care is available yet, it'll create an extremely difficult situation for those members, especially women and single parents. I hope the university considers this factor while planning for the fall semester.*

*My current understanding is that NY state has listed daycare opening under phase 4 of their reopening plan. If normal childcare (i.e. daycare) is not in place, will you make provisions for SBU faculty who are expected to resume teaching (either online or in person) in the fall? I am exhausted after spring semester. Totally exhausted.*

### **Interactive Learning Considerations**

There is a strong desire to promote a meaningful campus experience, regardless of the modality of the Fall semester. Recurring feedback includes:

- The potential for internship opportunities;

- Questions regarding options for clinical and lab classes; and
- Our ability to foster socialization in a restrictive environment

Below are some selected responses that illustrate key feedback:

*I hope we can consider maximizing internal opportunities for student experiential learning in order to fulfill major, minor, and SBC requirements. There are numerous institutional units that have the capacity to offer experiential learning to scale, from big data projects to revisiting those projects put off to the side for a "rainy day." Beyond the well-being of themselves and others, one of the biggest concerns among students right now is remaining as productive as possible in the pursuit of growth and development. We have an opportunity to support just that.*

*Our program (DPT) has 50 students at SB and 35 at SH. How would we handle labs? Students need hands on instruction that simulations and case studies do not address. If we are allowed to run multiple labs sessions are rooms being disinfected in between sessions and if so how and by whom?*

*We need hands on instruction so we can assure our accrediting body (CAPTE) that our students are safe to go out to clinical experiences.*

*Some policy/initiatives by the university, for bringing confidence concerning internships. Looking at the huge impact on economy I think this is required, students could rethink their admissions if they feel landing an internship/job would be difficult. So I would suggest some measures to build confidence (I know it won't be definite) in this regard would help future students.*

*Another important part of campus is clubs for students. It helps with their mental health. A lot of socializing happens there so requiring clubs to make most meetings on online through Zoom.*

## **Technology Considerations**

Reliable technology was a challenge for faculty, staff, and students alike during the Spring semester. Some struggled with WiFi connections, access to sufficient electronic equipment, and general technological glitches. Some also grappled with the transition to the online format. Below are some selected responses that illustrate key feedback:

*Now would be a great time to invest more in our IT infrastructure - updating Blackboard, buying reimbursement software so that we don't need to interact in person with staff (I used Concur at another university and it was great), expanding Qualtrics licenses to include business license and other functions so that we can do more online research, etc. We need these things to stay competitive with other institutions.*

*We should be mindful that not all students have the requisite access to technology in an online delivery modality. The University should evaluate the needs of all students (and even faculty/staff) to identify those who may not have internet connections or a dedicated laptop or other device for example. We should have a plan to assure that accommodations are available.*

*Formal online training for programs like Zoom should be provided.*

## **Considerations from Students**

Although students were not formally invited to take this survey, those who responded share strong opinions about their experiences thus far. Many are emphatic about their dislike of online instruction, while others feel strongly about not returning to campus. Several allude to the difficulties of concentrating at home. Some graduate students express fear about being forced into situations (especially in lab settings) that do not comply with social distancing protocol. International students hold a unique perspective, sharing their worries about their abilities to participate in an in-person Fall semester. Below are some selected responses that illustrate key feedback:

*I know that it is overwhelmingly likely that next semester's classes will be online, but please, for the sake of the mental health of Stony Brook's students, please let us move back on campus if we want to. This is so awful in so many ways and being back on campus would make online learning so much less painful*

*Please please don't keep up with prioritizing this 'publish or perish' mindset. I think that it will cause professors to not abide by social distancing protocol and put graduate students and SBU as a whole in danger. I think that professors and groups that are caught violating the social distancing guidelines should be punished with decreased hours they are allowed to have graduate students in lab during this uncertain vaccine free time. Without a punishment for overworking and endangering students and faculty, there is no way to stop this officially. I think that there should be a pathway to report uncooperative groups/PI's anonymously so that students and other faculty members don't have to worry about the power imbalance and being punished themselves for doing the right thing.*

*As an international student, I also want to emphasize the visa issue and flight issue that would prevent students coming back. Nowadays the international flights have been drastically reduced. For example, there are only four direct flights between US and China in one week. I know many who travelled from EU, Africa or other places to return home. Yesterday, I heard about someone who travelled four countries to return home. Besides many of us bought more than one ticket. For example, I bought five tickets, four of which are cancelled, with the remaining one quite uncertain. Once we return, it will be even more difficult to come back. The only way to return, as I know, is to stay for half a month in Mexico, and then to US. That's definitely not safe. But to stay is not safe either. So our emotion is quite complicated and I am very worried to hear you say that we must return in-person.*

*As an international undergraduate student who currently went back to China due to COVID-19, I strongly recommend continuing distance studying (online courses) for fall 2020. Because according to CDC, US still do not allow Chinese to enter. I am not sure if I could come back to US in fall, so I might have to consider Leave of Absence which will cause a huge interruption to my academic life. It will also be a waste of money if I consider Leave of Absence because I will learn nothing but I still need to pay for the tuition. If the university could consider distance study, I believe it will not only be a good thing for the international students, but also good for other students who live in New York and other states. Their family might worry about their health if they go face to face and it needs a huge work and amount of money to maintain the campus disinfected. Like some students who stay on campus, we know to maintain social distancing in public area, but it is very hard for us to keep social distancing in the dorm, since everyone is using same restroom, and there will be 2 students live in one room. We know there is also asymptomatic people who even do not know they have COVID-19, so what if my roommate has it and I am infected unwittingly? So I highly suggest that our university consider maintaining distance studying in fall 2020 and waiting for everything get better in NY.*

*I'm an incoming transfer student who really wants to be on campus, I know very well why the fall semester might not happen on campus, but as a new student I just hope you consider every possible factor.*

*Please exhaust ALL OPTIONS for online learning wherever possible. It is the safest option for many students. We have families and children. Staying home for classes is the best way to ensure safety. I already will be required to expose myself in my time during field work collecting my required hours. I have no choice with that. But I can limit the risk of exposure to my child by not having to go into the hospital for classes as a Health Science student.*

*It was super hard to transition online in the first place. I understand that this wasn't something in the university's hands, but it was very hard on a lot of students, myself included. I understand the pass/fail option was given, but when you work really hard and don't choose that, it became overwhelming at times. There's already so much anxiety around this whole issue when that's not what we need. Having all these doubts and questions involving school as well added on top, in my opinion, only messes with individuals more. At the end of the day you guys are going to have to do and follow what you need to do. But think about all the kids that are not going to gain from online learning and possibly the potential lawsuits that may come because of it. If there's a way to try to get people on campus but with stricter regulations I think we should at least try. It's 4 months from now. If we're going to jump the gun and already assume this is still going to be awful, what kind of attitude is that? The world doesn't need any more negativity and doubt right now. We have that.*

*PLEASE HAVE IN PERSON CLASSES.*

### **Gratitude for Inclusion in the Planning Process**

Many respondents shared their deep appreciation for being granted the opportunity to provide input. The below responses underscore this sense of gratitude for participating in the process:

*This form is a great idea - to collect and listen to the thoughts of the members of the university directly. I really appreciate it. Thank you for all your effort during this difficult time!*

*Thank you for the opportunity to be part of the process and for the extraordinary leadership President Bernstein.*

*I appreciate the inclusive approach to this decision-making to the greatest extent possible. Thank you and hope you all continue to be well.*



*This message is a great example of thoughtful, transparent leadership. I think Interim President Bernstein and the entire leadership team are doing a great job under very trying circumstances. As you plan for next semester, let me know if you want to borrow my crystal ball. Might need some Windex.*

### **Recommendations**

1. People's feelings are strong, and fears about their health and safety must be taken seriously. Every communication effort needs to take this issue into consideration. Communicate frequently, empathically, and uniformly, all while placing health and safety as the core priority.
2. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and accessibility concerns must play a key role in planning and have increased visibility.
3. Opinions about online learning are mixed. What is clear, however, is that the sooner a decision is made, the better the instructional quality and learning experience will be for faculty, students, and staff.
4. Consider housing priority for the following constituencies:
  - a. Students with accessibility, DEI, and technology needs in which their participation in online coursework might be compromised if they are not on campus; and
  - b. Members of the campus community who contribute to our cutting-edge research mission.
5. Be thoughtful about the balance between people's perceptions of their health and well-being and their desire to work from home, especially for those with increased familial obligations.

6. Build on the goodwill that the administration has established in offering to listen to community concerns. Consider inviting student voices to a next round of input, such as hosting focus groups with student leaders.