

Report on the New York State Lockdown during COVID-19

March 26, 2020

The author wishes to remain anonymous

The NYS Shutdown has certainly impacted our university. The care of students living on campus and general operation of the campus are included as Essential Services and were not required to be shutdown although our staffing levels were required to be reduced.

Prior to the NYS Shutdown we had implemented our emergency response team and had already determined that the academic programs would be delivered through alternative and remote methods for the remainder of the semester. We had planned to have faculty and staff work remotely to the extent practical in order to improve our ability for social distancing. These plans had been implemented prior to the shutdown and are working well.

A significant issue we faced was that the onset of the virus corresponded with the week that our student were on spring break. Communications were difficult, students had not been prepared to stay away from campus and most had flights that would bring them back to campus without going home. In addition, a large population of international students had no place else to go. Our university encouraged students to go home or stay home, but many had to come to campus to pick up their academic materials. Students are continuing to check out of their residence halls and apartments. Once most are gone, we intend to consolidate the remaining students to one area of the campus.

We quickly enacted out quarantine plans but the numbers were higher than expected due to the return from spring break travel. Our staff was stressed due to the fear and many unknowns associated with the disease. Communication was critical, but email alone was insufficient for many. In person discussions, video messages, signage and written letters were critical to getting out the facts and correct information.

Some issues that needed to be addressed included:

- What responsibility did the university have associated with non-residential students

- How would we be able to support research activity
- How could we support Student Workers many of which depended on that income for housing.
- Delivering packages and mail needed to be figured out as well to ensure that invoices are paid.
- Reducing spending to include only that which is critical to delivering academic credit and operating the campus.

In terms of Facilities Staffing our university has made it a priority to keep our employees whole through the crisis in terms of providing for their safety, and their employment.

Facilities staffing was reduced once the number of people on campus had reduced significantly. Until then, custodial staff was reassigned to perform cleaning of restrooms and disinfection of common touch points. Other services were drastically reduced.

Currently, facilities staff are focused on maintaining the residence halls for those students remaining on campus. Maintenance staff are on a rotating assignment to ensure systems operations. Renovation projects were suspended to reduce the number of visitors on campus.

HR issues were well addressed in terms of the various scenarios that could be conceived. We had plans that addressed employees that needed to be quarantined, were sick, had dependents home either sick or in need of child care, and people who are at higher risk. All of these policies were intended to keep our employees whole throughout the crisis.

Staffing levels have been challenged, but since the scope of services was reduced to the Residence Halls, we have been able to manage the staff into 2 crews on rotating weekly assignments. Constant communication is required to ensure their safety and continued support of our students.