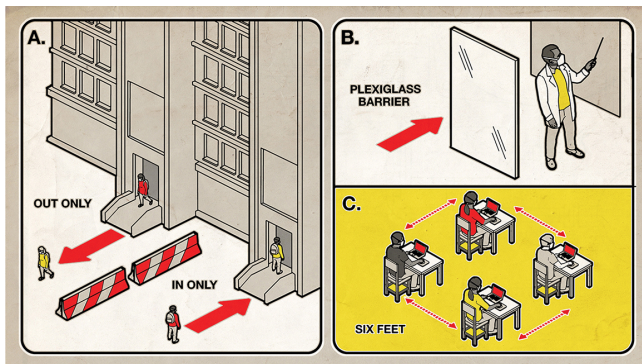


THE CHRONICLE of Higher Education

Welcome to the Socially Distanced Campus

By Francie Diep and Megan Zahneis | May 26, 2020

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Son of Alan for The Chronicle

Darlene M. Campo welcomed her first students back on campus at 9:15 a.m. on May 11. Excited, they all arrived on time, or even early. Campo, associate dean for allied health at Western Technical College, in La Crosse, Wis., said they weren't the only ones: "The faculty said that they haven't felt this giddy coming back since they were

in school."

In Wisconsin, students in health-care occupational programs were designated this spring as "essential" and therefore eligible for a return to in-person instruction for labs and other course requirements that can't be completed online. Campo's eight students, standing several feet apart and most wearing masks, chatted on the sidewalk outside the Health Science Center while Campo let them through the front doors, one by one. They signed waivers and attested to not having any of the six common Covid-19 symptoms listed on a poster. Campo aimed an infrared thermometer at their brows.

That first day had a festive air, but over the next week, the process came to seem routine. "They got used to it. I got used to it," Campo said.

Welcome to the new normal.

One day, students across the country will return to their colleges, just as Western's physical-therapy students have. Nobody knows exactly when that will happen because so much depends on the future spread of the novel coronavirus and on orders by state and federal officials. But many college presidents have suggested it will be fairly soon — this fall, in fact. Whenever it happens, as long as no vaccine exists yet, it is likely to involve some social distancing.

College leaders are already preparing for that future by considering ideas to prevent the virus's spread in spaces like classrooms, dining halls, and dormitories. To get a sense of what studying, working, and living on a socially distanced campus would look like, *The Chronicle* gathered documents and interviewed administrators to learn their plans to re-engineer their campuses' physical spaces to blunt the virus's contagion. *The Chronicle* heard proposals from community colleges and public and private four-year institutions with enrollments ranging from fewer than 400 to 30,000.

Many administrators emphasized they had not made firm decisions yet, but they shared ideas that might work for themselves and others.

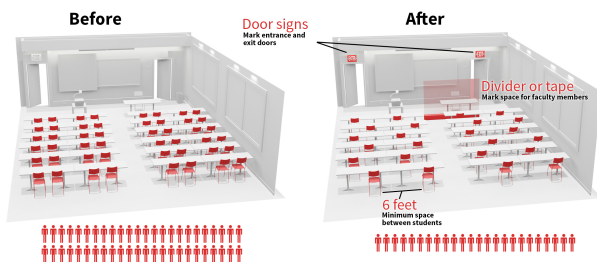
'Stranger Things Have Happened'

In a way, social distancing in classrooms is straightforward. Colleges need to put fewer students in the same space, or the same number of students in more or larger spaces.

Many interventions are likely to be low-tech. Institutions say they'll remove furniture to discourage students from sitting too close to one another, and tape off furniture that can't be removed. They'll designate entry and exit doors for classrooms, where possible, and redefine meeting rooms or event spaces as makeshift classrooms. Doorknobs may be removed in favor of hands-free options.

The University of Miami may even hold some classes outdoors, once Florida's temperatures cool in the fall. The university's president, Julio Frenk, told *The Chronicle* it was like "going back to the Greek ideal of academe, which was the olive grove where the philosophers would meet." Even tents are an option, said Kevin E.

Kirby, vice president for administration at Rice University, where he leads its crisis-management advisory committee. “Large temporary structures,” he said, could be used as classrooms or overflow study spaces.



Chronicle illustration by Jacquelyn Elias

At Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, classrooms will hold fewer students, contain barriers between faculty members and students, and have marked entry and exit doors.

Campuses may take extra precautions to protect faculty members, who because of their age may be at higher risk than their students of contracting a serious case of Covid-19. Tape on the floor might remind students not to come within six feet of their instructor, or faculty members might find themselves teaching behind plexiglass screens, as Purdue University’s president, Mitch Daniels, [told CNN](#).

“As a professor, I have a hard time envisioning how I can engage with my classroom if I’m surrounded by plexiglass,” said Kathryn M. Cardarelli, senior assistant provost for faculty affairs and professional development at the University of Kentucky. “But stranger things have happened.”

Even straightforward spacing creates some thorny problems, however.

Class schedules will have to be reconfigured. Many campuses are considering lengthening the time between course sessions, to lessen the class-to-class rush and give the custodial staff time to deep-clean. That means longer days and weeks.

“Traditionally, folks don’t like Monday-morning classes or Friday-afternoon classes,” said Michael Rounds, vice provost for operations at the University of Kansas. “That’s probably going to be much more flexible than it used to be.”

Even weekend classes are on the table at Kentucky, said Cardarelli, who leads a scenario-planning team there. “I’ve heard a lot of negative feedback about that idea,” she admitted.

At Texas A&M University at San Antonio, students could take multiple classes with the same small group of peers, whose size would be dictated by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance on large gatherings, in a block schedule. The arrangement might be more suited to freshmen taking required or introductory courses, and could resemble their past schooling. “Your first class would be English, your second class would be math, the third class would be science,” said Cynthia Teniente-Matson, the president. Theoretically, keeping students in smaller groups that don’t interact could help limit the spread of the coronavirus, should anybody become infected. It could also help make contact tracing easier.

Kentucky administrators have even considered assigning students to small cohorts that would stay in one classroom — within a residence hall — all day, and professors would come to them. Even so, Cardarelli said, students would remain socially distanced in their seats.

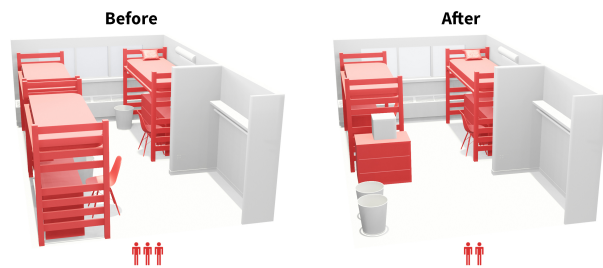
If a 30-student class becomes a 10-student one, how will the college keep teaching the other 20, without overburdening its faculty? Forms of hybrid instruction figure heavily in many campuses’ fall planning. Frenk, of the University of Miami, proposed that in a class that meets on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, one-third of the students could attend in person each day, with the remaining two-thirds watching live online.

‘People Will Eat in Shifts’

Dorms — where students share bedrooms, bathrooms, late-night barbecue-wing orders, and hallway talks — seem among the riskiest environments for viral spread.

Michigan Technological University and the University of California at San Diego are considering eliminating triple dorm rooms, and administrators at Texas A&M in San Antonio have said they definitely will.

At the University of Kansas, Sarah Waters, the director of student housing, said she hadn’t made any decision on triples, but is



Chronicle illustration by Jacquelyn Elias

Michigan Technological University is among the colleges eliminating triple-occupancy dorm rooms.

seeking to reduce the density of shared rooms and bathrooms overall. In addition, Kansas plans to set aside some housing to quarantine students who contract Covid-19. All of those plans mean Kansas expects to be able to offer on-campus housing to fewer students than in a typical year.

Some campuses may welcome back only certain swaths of students to maintain low residency levels. Cardarelli heard

proposals from people on Kentucky's planning teams to house only first-year students and seniors on campus this fall. Others argued for giving priority to professional students — those in medicine, nursing, and chemistry, for example — who need clinical experience. Cases were made, too, for fine-arts students who take studio or performance courses, for athletes who need access to training facilities, and for doctoral students nearing degree completion.

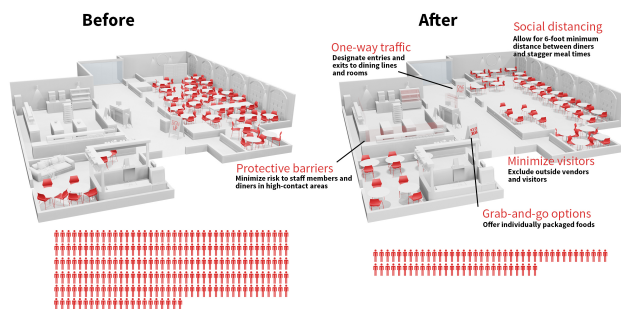
A few institutions have enough dorm space — and a small-enough student body — to offer everyone a single room, and they've been vocal about their rare ability to do so. They include Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, in Florida, and Sweet Briar College, a small, private liberal-arts institution for women in rural Virginia that nearly shut down in 2015. The latter will offer single rooms at the price of doubles.

“We are a very small college sitting on 3,200 acres of jaw-dropping, beautiful campus,” said Meredith Woo, Sweet Briar's president. “We feel that we are probably very well situated, thank God.”

Whenever students venture out of their dorms to eat, their dining-hall experience may be swifter and lonelier than they're used to.

Several campuses plan to open their dining halls for takeout only. Sweet Briar envisions seated meals, but each two-person table will be six feet apart. At Kentucky, if dining halls are open, students may be required to wear masks when they're not

eating, and plexiglass screens could guard check-in and checkout areas, Cardarelli said. Prepackaged meals might replace buffets.



Chronicle illustration by Jacquelyn Elias

This model demonstrates how a dining hall might change at Sweet Briar College based on plans the college shared with The Chronicle.

Dining-hall meals are often a big social time for students. “That will end,” said Kirby, at Rice, “and people will eat in shifts.” Students will be assigned a time to eat, and dining halls will stay open longer to accommodate staggered mealtimes.

‘Only a Piece of Paper’

It’s one thing to make rules; it’s quite another to get thousands of students to

follow them.

In classrooms, that responsibility might fall to someone in a new campus role. It would be unfair to expect faculty members to police social distancing while they’re teaching, said Teniente-Matson, at Texas A&M in San Antonio. So she envisioned someone else would do it instead: a “classroom steward” who would ensure that students maintain social distancing and wear masks if they’re required to do so.

The specifics of the role are still being worked out, the president added. Stewards might sit in the back of every classroom or rove the campus.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week released guidelines for reopening colleges suggesting that institutions “conduct daily health checks or ask faculty, staff, and students to conduct self-checks.” After all, social distancing on campus alone can’t choke off the virus when many students venture off campus, exposing themselves to many more people, many times a week.

At Western, Campo’s intake procedure — with its thermometer and symptoms checklist — aims to control for that. At Michigan Tech, administrators are considering another option: asking staff and faculty members to attest each day that they don’t

have Covid-19 symptoms before coming to work. Perhaps they could submit online forms with the symptom pledge that would be required to activate their keycards, said Ian Repp, the assistant vice president for marketing and communications.

To thoroughly monitor for coronavirus infections on campus, institutions will want to test their community members on a regular basis. The University of California at San Diego announced plans this month to test each of the 5,000 students currently on its campus for active coronavirus infections, as a trial run for larger-scale testing in the fall. The university imagines eventually testing most of its 65,000 students, staff, and faculty every month, to try to catch outbreaks before they spread.

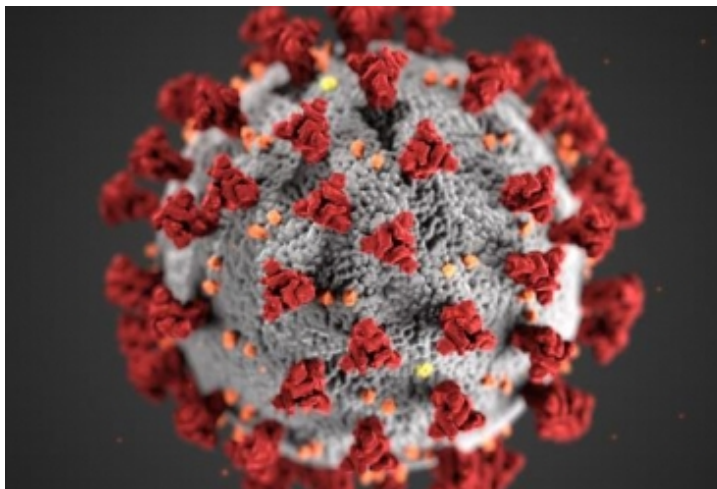
Jonathan M. Links, vice provost and chief risk and compliance officer at the Johns Hopkins University, envisions twice-weekly testing for everyone at his institution — which, on its main campus, in Baltimore, would total 10,000 people. How such widespread testing could be funded and conducted is still unclear, but Links and Stephen J. Gange, executive vice provost for academic affairs and an epidemiologist by training, said they anticipated testing about 4,000 people each day and delivering results 24 hours later. Eventually, they hope, tests could be self-administered and saliva-based. And, if successful, large-scale testing could serve as an alternative to physical distancing.

“If we can do enough testing, tracing, isolation, and quarantine, then we think we can have more folks in a space,” Links said. “We may or may not be able to pull it off, but we’re trying.”

Coronavirus Hits Campus

As colleges and universities have struggled to devise policies to respond to the quickly evolving situation, here are links to *The Chronicle's* key coverage of how this worldwide health crisis is affecting campuses.

- Here's a List of Colleges' Plans for Reopening in the Fall
- We're Tracking Employees Laid Off or Furloughed by Colleges
- Why Colleges Should Plan for an Exclusively Online Fall ✓ PREMIUM



Some campuses are debating whether to test for active infections or for antibodies, which indicate if someone got the new coronavirus in the past and has now recovered (or perhaps never experienced severe symptoms in the first place). Public-health guidelines generally recommend active-infection testing, in part because researchers can't yet say whether a positive antibody-test result means a person is now immune to reinfection, although the science is evolving and promising.

Meanwhile, institutions are considering strategies to foster the deep cultural changes needed to ensure that people stick to new habits. The University of Colorado at Boulder has already begun online training that faculty and staff members will have to complete before they can return to campus, said Daniel Jones, associate vice chancellor for integrity, safety, and compliance.

Students at Boulder will have their own Covid-19 training to complete, through the campus's Canvas learning-management system. First-year students will receive an extended version of that training, through both their residence halls and a "CU 101" course that includes modules on the epidemiology of Covid-19 and behavioral expectations to stop its spread, said Ann Schmiesing, executive vice provost for academic-resource management.

Embry-Riddle has adopted a “campus influencers” program in which student-government leaders, ROTC commanders, faculty senators, administrators, and others will ask rule flouters to put their masks back on. Administrators also plan numerous softer nudges, including posters and fliers promoting social distancing. Everyone on campus now wears a badge reminding others to stay six feet away, and the university is printing T-shirts with slogans like “Respect my wingspan.” (Embry-Riddle’s mascot is an eagle.)

“It's one thing to write a bunch of rules and policies down,” the institution’s president, P. Barry Butler, said, “but if you don't have people participating in the solution, it's only a piece of paper.”

Francie Diep is a staff reporter covering money in higher ed. Follow her on Twitter @francediep, or email her at francie.diep@chronicle.com. Megan Zahneis is a reporting fellow for The Chronicle. Follow her on Twitter at @meganzahneis, or email her at megan.zahneis@chronicle.com.

Correction (5/27/2020, 9:55 a.m.): This article originally misstated when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued recommendations for colleges that reopen. That happened last week, not this week. The article has been changed accordingly.

This article is part of:
The Reopened Campus

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1255 23rd Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037