

MEMO: Academic and Pandemic Planning
Tue, Jun 2, 10:26 AM

Dear Simmons Students, Parents, Faculty and Staff,

As much of our collective attention remains focused on the horrific events around our country, our fall planning work at Simmons must and is continuing. Today, I'm writing today to provide our community with the latest update on our academic and pandemic planning.

Last week, the Higher Education Working Group of the Governor's Reopening Advisory Board released a recommended four-phased approach to safely reopen higher education institutions in Massachusetts. I've had the honor of serving with 14 other college presidents on this working group.

In each phase, a variety of public health, PPE and testing criteria must be met. That said, circumstances of each university are very different. Space, residential and classroom flexibility, location within the Commonwealth, and the composition of the student, faculty and staff populations are among the many factors that will mean that different universities will make different decisions. At Simmons, providing a safe and engaging living and learning environment for our students and community is our top priority. While we are eager to reopen our campus, we will only do so when we know we can provide the level of safety the state recommends.

To determine our capabilities in this regard, we have established a Simmons University COVID-19 Recovery Task Force that is evaluating all possible scenarios about when and how to reopen this fall. Using the available guidance from Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker and public health experts, the task force consists of seven sub-committees that continue to analyze a host of issues related to students, faculty and staff, academics, campus infrastructure, situation monitoring and tracking and testing, financial implications and communications. Among the specific issues the teams are considering:

- Ability to provide an engaging and enriching academic experience
- Adequate supplies of PPE for students, faculty and staff
- How to secure rapid testing and contact tracing capabilities to identify individuals who have COVID-19 and those who have come into contact with them
- Maintaining social distancing in dorms, dining halls, classrooms, bathrooms, hallways, staircases, elevators and other spaces
- Comprehensive cleaning and disinfecting process
- Safe and redesigned dining services
- Effective quarantine and self-isolation areas

Simmons

UNI • Adequate symptom monitoring and contact tracing for COVID-19 exposure

We will open our campus as soon as possible. But any reopening will require many complex and significant changes to the way we operate, socialize, live and learn. Our planning, like that of other higher education institutions, is compounded by a high degree of uncertainty associated with the pandemic, financial considerations and the possible considerable impact to the student experience.

We will keep you posted on our progress and appreciate your continued patience while we explore all the possibilities in a responsible and thoughtful way.

In the meantime, our plan for a more robust online experience if we cannot physically open in September is making excellent progress. Our faculty are working extraordinarily hard, in partnership with leading online education firm 2U, to deliver 300 undergraduate courses that are specifically designed for a virtual environment. I'm grateful for their dedication and commitment, which ensures students can continue their academic studies no matter what happens this fall.

I'd also like to remind you about the event taking place this evening at 6 p.m. The College of Social Sciences, Policy and Practice, in partnership with our Office of Organizational Culture, Inclusion and Equity, is hosting a [virtual community conversation](#) about the national protests against police violence in the Black community. I hope to see you there.

These past few weeks have been incredibly difficult, as the nation surpassed 100,000 deaths from the coronavirus and we have witnessed these tragic examples of racism and inequality in our country. In the midst of this pain, I remain grateful for the empathy, resiliency and passion of our community.

Sincerely,

Helen