

COMMUNITYCONNECT

COVID 19 Series: Higher Education

Thursday, September 24, 2020 | 3 pm

CHAT SUMMARY

Below is a summary of the Chat Box exchange during the SMA Community Connect session – COVID-19: Higher Education – on Thursday, September 24, 2020 at 3 pm. This provides viewers to see what additional questions were posed and answered during the session that weren't part of the video recording.

QUESTION: The pressure and stress you and your institution's leadership and faculty are experiencing must be tremendous. How are you and your teams holding up?

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : Thanks for the question. Delivering content and student experience across multiple modalities is a brave new world for all of us. Supporting each other's health and that of our community is very important. Many of the services we traditionally reserved for students are now being taken advantage of by members from across our institutions, including mental health, spiritual support, and career guidance.

From Dr Siddiqi - HCC-Central : I would say collaboration for the same mission: student success brought us all stakeholders together. We quickly developed a team that worked day and day out to make alternate instructional plans and devise student support policies.

QUESTION: *Question submitted by attendee Claude Wynn:* What projections do you follow for full return?

From Kevin Kirby - Rice University : Not sure exactly what you mean Claude, but one excellent source of information on our local environment is the Texas medical Center website

From Dr Siddiqi - HCC-Central : We are closely monitoring COVID related data and situation in our service area. We started online instruction for Fall 2020 in August. For lab-based courses, we are opening our labs for students on October 5, 2020 following CDC guidelines. For us safety and health of our constituents are paramount. So far some students have expressed concerns returning back for labs, but on the other hand, we have a large number of students who have expressed interest returning back in October.

QUESTION: *submitted by attendee Maria Gallegos from the Houston Zoo:* How do you deal with noncompliance or medical exemptions?

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : Claude: The pandemic has changed the way we look at what a full return means. Many of our students enjoy the online experience they have discovered, and still others have enrolled because online provides them an opportunity to attend when they couldn't before. We also have many students eager to get back to campus. We are working toward accommodating those needs with as much flexibility as possible, and enrollments reflect that students are seeking that.

From Kevin Kirby - Rice University : Maria: Fortunately, that has not been a problem for us to date. All students and employees were required to go through an on-line training that laid out our expectations for their behavior this semester. And our normal discipline processes are used to deal with the few cases we have had to date.

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : Maria - very good question. As with Rice, we have provided much guidance. In the event that we must accommodate someone for medical exemption, we will of course figure that out based on those individual circumstances. If someone refuses to comply with our protocols, our last resort is that UPD will escort them off campus.

QUESTION: *submitted by registrant Dean Strombom at Gensler:* what happens if positive testing increases on your campus?

From Dr Siddiqi - HCC-Central : We have a robust contingency plan and decision tree to address any such issues based on extent/frequency and potential impact of the virus on participants.

From Kevin Kirby - Rice University : Fortunately we have many tools at our disposal. We can change policies, densities, modify the physical environment, increase testing, etc. We can also take measures that have different durations (e.g., pause classes for two weeks as many institutions have done). It's a bit like flying an airplane

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : Dean - Our university has had a total of 23 cases since the pandemic began, 4 of those this last month. We anticipate there will of course be more, and are prepared to use our trained contact tracers, quarantining and the many other safety protocols we have been putting in place to keep our campus as safe as we can. If it becomes clear that in person instruction needs to go back online, we are ready for that as well.

QUESTION: This session was pre-recorded a few days ago. Have there been any changes in the COVID-19 issues at your universities in the past week?

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : University of St. Thomas reopens for limited in-person instruction on Monday! After much patience, preparation and guidance from our friends at the Texas Medical Center, we are as ready as we can be, and many of our students are eager to return.

From Dr Siddiqi - HCC-Central : Nothing significant! We are still monitoring cases in the area to inform our decisions about the re-opening plans.

From Kevin Kirby - Rice University : other than a couple of weather events that complicated our pandemic response, we are basically in the same position as we approach the middle of the semester.

QUESTION: We keep reading reports of college and professional athletes "opting out" of the current seasons. Have any of your instructors opted out for the semester or year?

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : As an NCAA Division III school, our student-athletes are just as much students as they are athletes, and we are not seeing this phenomenon occur. Thanks!

QUESTION: What do you think your campus environment and course curriculums will be like for the spring semester?

From Kevin Kirby - Rice University : 97% of our students re-enrolled. And assume the Spring semester will be very similar to the Fall semester for us.

QUESTION: Do you foresee normal summer classes next year?

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : Many of the changes we implemented will grow into a lasting part of our landscape. The definition of 'normal' has changed. Choice of modality will be the new normal!

From Kevin Kirby - Rice University : Same for Rice. We will have many more on-line classes for next summer, even if most of the pandemic has passed

From Dr Siddiqi - HCC-Central : I would say operating under the "new normal" has definitely taught us on how to use technology at its optimal level to offer instructions to a large number of students. In future, we will be trying to further explore a fine balance between in person and online instructions and investment that is required to maintain and support that balance.

QUESTION: As a leader of a major institution of higher learning, what is keeping you awake at night as you think about how this pandemic plays out?

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : What keeps us up at night, other than Tropical Storms, is keeping pace with the rapid change of landscape and creating an environment that keeps our students as safe as possible.

From Kevin Kirby - Rice University : Since we went remote in March, we have held to our unwavering belief that what we do matters – regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In prior crises such as world wars, natural disasters and pandemics, education and research have not stopped at Rice or nationally – rather these core missions became even more important and adapted to the moment. We transform the lives of young people, create knowledge for the betterment of our world, and provide a forum to debate the societal issues of our time. It may sound clichéd, but we need to do our work now more than ever, and not hibernate until the pandemic ends.

COMMENTS:

from Susan Young - SMA Board Mbr : I love the paradigm of transformative year rather than lost year. Excellent framework for most aspects of society, economic, political engagement.

From Greg Marshall - Rice University : Wonderful program--thanks to all!

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : Thank you!!

From Dr Siddiqi - HCC-Central : Thanks all!

From Susan Young - SMA Board Mbr : thank you all. EXCELLENT.

From Linda Trevino - METRO : This discussion was great! And can apply to the corporate world as well!

From Jeff Olsen - Univ. of St. Thomas : This was a great program, thank for involving UST!