



Framingham
State University

**LIVE TO THE TRUTH WITH RESPONSIBILITY,
RESPONSIVENESS AND RESILIENCE**



Addendum: FSU's Plan for a Return to Learning and Working On Campus

A NEW AND IMPROVED NORMAL ON THE HORIZON

SPRING 2021

Addendum: FSU’s Plan for a Return to Learning and Working on Campus

A New and Improved Normal on the Horizon

Spring 2021

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Letter from the President

The turn of the calendar page to 2021 is merely a gesture and the start of the spring 2021 semester an annual event that during this period of pandemic may not be remembered so much by themselves but for the public health breakthroughs and the changes to society that this year has hopefully ushered in. If 2020 was the year of the pandemic and social and political unrest, our hope is that 2021 begins a period where the world controls the coronavirus versus it controlling the world and where there can be collective versus divisive action on the part of the nations' people and government to address matters of social justice that amends the inequities that have been worsened by the greatest public health crisis of this generation.

And how will we address this work? TOGETHER as an FSU community:

- one student at a time...
- one mask at a time...
- one test at a time...
- one vaccine at a time...
- for as long as it takes...

This update to our original Plan for Return to Learning and Working On Campus originally published in June 2021 reflects on the fall 2020 term and looks ahead to the spring and summer periods. It identifies changes in our practices and forecasts plans for our immediate future. It tracks against the original plan but expands its reach by addressing potential vaccine administration and issues identified in the FSU employee and student surveys conducted in late December 2020 and early January 2021.

Our watch words for the summer and fall 2020 were responsiveness, responsibility and resilience. Living to those truths during this period as a full university community witnessed high levels of compliance and low levels of viral spread on campus. Now we must continue those same efforts as we anticipate a vaccine that will address the coronavirus as only it can. Now we will add to our efforts another duty – rebuild. We will set our sights on regaining our student enrollment and housing occupancy; we will address racial inequities where they are identified and we will refocus our energies so that the FSU of 2021 and beyond is rebuilt even better than before. We have learned much about ourselves, our capacities, and our responsibilities during this pandemic and these next steps will see us through the rest of the crisis while paving our path beyond the current condition.



F. Javier Cevallos
President

Looking Back

Not even a year has transpired since the University began to prepare for what appeared to be a public health concern similar to the H1N1 (swine flu) pandemic of 2009 that prompted institutions of higher education to ready themselves for the potential impact on their daily operating systems. But unlike the H1N1 virus, that gave us time to repair and ultimately had little to none of the anticipated impact on us, the coronavirus, now referred to as COVID-19, was nearly upon us as we dusted off our pandemic plans and re-wrote them to adapt to an environment of daily change. Governmental edicts effecting our operations and responsibilities were issued and implemented with little to no notice and our governmental officials strove to keep pace as they responded to public health officials who were similarly learning and doing almost simultaneously.

The spring 2020 term was converted to remote format in nearly every way in March 2020. While managing this, teams were assembled to address the multitude of decisions required to manage the University under this new restricted environment. These were working teams that produced policies, procedures, signage, communications, digital content and anything else necessary to run the University while trying our best to maintain low levels of virus transmission on campus.

By-and-large the plans worked. Not because they were so expertly crafted, since there were many responsive changes as the fall term wore on, but because the FSU community responded and acted responsibly to comply with the rules, work and learn in a way they were adjusting to and show their care for one another in keeping our physical distance while striving to maintain the educational and emotional closeness that is FSU's hallmark.

The spring 2021 term will begin much as fall 2020 ended with all of the same public health protocols in place on campus. The standards set forth in the [Plan for Return to Learning and Working on Campus](#) remain largely the same except where public health standards have changed. Examples of that include the [wearing of masks or face coverings in all locations where you are in public](#) – inside or out – alone or with others. Additionally, the [Massachusetts Higher Education Control Plan](#) was reissued several times over the course of the fall term with the most recent and current document being issued on December 11, 2020. FSU responded by re-reviewing practices and protocols and adjusting as needed to meet or exceed the minimum requirements.

Additional efforts that were completed in the spring 2020 and fall 2020 term include:

CARES Act Funding

Framingham State University was granted \$1,948,876 from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund for distribution to students enrolled at the university and effected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of December 31, 2020, the University has distributed \$1,728,350 of that amount assisting 2,777 students. An additional \$1,728,350 was received by the University for administrative use and was used exclusively to reimburse the costs of housing and dining returned to students in the spring 2020 term when the University went to an all remote format.

The spring 2021 term will see additional CARES Act/Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) II funds allocated to the University for direct student aid and administrative use to offset pandemic related costs. Currently we are projected to receive an additional \$1,948,876 for student emergency aid

and approximately \$4,407,497 for administrative use. More information on the use of CARES Act funds at FSU can be found on the [FSU website](#).

Coordination of COVID-19 Activities

Beginning with an initial team charged with “editing the existing pandemic plan for FSU” in February 2020 under the leadership of Dr. Meg Nowak-Borrego, this group guided the University’s COVID-19 response during the early weeks and months of the world pandemic. This group subdivided into five separate “continuity teams” that worked from May to September (with many continuing their work now) to address the multitude of details required to welcome students back to FSU for the fall term – on campus, remotely and in a hybrid format. Additional teams were formed in late August, a COVID Oversight Team to review other teams’ recommendations and advance to the Executive Staff and the President for review and the Campus COVID-19 Analytics Team (CCAT) whose task was to review weekly the University’s metrics related to COVID-19 (e.g. testing results, quarantine bed availability, critical operational staffing levels, etc...) as well as the local and statewide data to determine if recommendations for changes to operations were warranted. Later in the fall term, an informal group was formalized to oversee COVID-19 Testing Logistics. COVID-19 Oversight, CCAT and the Testing Logistics Teams will all continue during the spring semester remaining responsive to the changes that no doubt lies ahead.

Assessing Our Work

At the conclusion of the fall 2020 term, two online surveys were administered. The first to the University’s employees and the second to FSU students. The results reflected important information that the COVID Teams and the Administration in general will consider and address concerns to the extent possible during the spring and summer 2021 terms.

Employee Survey

Over 200 employees responded to the survey administered in late December 2020 and early January 2021. Highlights of these results are listed here:

93% strongly agreed or agreed that the communications used during the summer and through the fall semester to describe COVID-19 plans for the University were clear.

88% strongly agreed or agreed that the frequency of communications to the University community met their needs and expectations.

91% strongly agreed or agreed that the information regarding COVID-19 testing on campus was clear and understandable.

69% strongly agreed or agreed that the Coronavirus information link on the FSU website was useful, accessible and timely for their needs.

91% strongly agreed or agreed that campus signage regarding COVID-19 mitigation practices and requirements were clear and helpful.

58% strongly agreed or agreed that communications regarding personnel policies related to COVID-19 were clear and helpful. An additional 30% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

82% strongly agreed or agreed that when they worked on campus, their working environment felt safe and in accordance with COVID-19 standards.

85% strongly agreed or agreed that the online symptom checker was helpful and easy to use.

65% strongly agreed or agreed that if they observed and reported a concern of COVID-19 protocols to their supervisor or administration that they responded and addressed the situation. An additional 27% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

57% strongly agreed or agreed that the University expressed concern and offered assistance if they requested it regarding emotional support due to COVID-19. An additional 36% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

66% of the respondents participated in on-campus testing and of those participants 98% found the FSU COVID-19 testing process and location to be organized and felt comfortable participating in the testing process. 90% of this group found the Mediat system used to help schedule a COVID-19 test to be helpful and easy to use. 92% found the CareEvolve test result system to be helpful and easy to use.

Responses to the question on suggested improvements to COVID-19 practices for the spring 2021 semester varied greatly with many responding that they were very satisfied with the University's response. Common concerns included:

- ◆ Expansion of testing from one day a week to multiple days to accommodate schedules
- ◆ Improved formal communications to the FSU community via the website and improved timeliness of these communications to aid in compliance and planning by departments
- ◆ Improved compliance for those required to test (students or employees)
- ◆ Compliance with mask/face covering wearing in all locations and alternately penalties for noncompliance
- ◆ Concerns that additional efforts need to be made to address emotional concerns for students remotely from campus
- ◆ Requests for COVID-19 vaccine administration for the campus community

Student Survey

Over 540 students responded to the survey administered in late December 2020 through January 2021. 23% are residential students. 85% are day program students, 10% graduate and 5% continuing education. The "neither agreed or disagreed statistic" is important to consider as several students (77%) who responded may not have been on campus or engaged in testing regularly if at all.

73% strongly agreed or agreed that the frequency of communications to the University community met their needs and expectations. An additional 14% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

71% strongly agreed or agreed that the Coronavirus information link on the FSU website was useful, accessible and timely for their needs. An additional 25% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

66% strongly agreed or agreed that campus signage regarding COVID-19 mitigation practices and requirements were clear and helpful. An additional 31% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

77% strongly agreed or agreed that information regarding COVID-19 testing on campus was clear and understandable. An additional 17% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

56% strongly agreed or agreed that the technology (e.g. online symptom checker, CareEvolve test registration and testing results transmission, etc.) used to help manage COVID-19 practices and policies was helpful and easy to use. An additional 38% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

48% strongly agreed or agreed that the University expressed concern and offered assistance if they requested it regarding emotional support due to COVID-19. An additional 42% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement.

66% of the respondents participated in on-campus testing and of those participants 98% found the FSU COVID-19 testing process and location to be organized and felt comfortable participating in the testing process.

Responses to the question on suggested improvements to COVID-19 practices for the spring 2021 semester varied greatly with many responding that they were very satisfied with the University's response. Common concerns included:

- ◆ Expansion of testing from one day a week to multiple days to accommodate schedules
- ◆ Testing students who live on campus weekly
- ◆ Testing commuter and off-campus students with classes on campus more regularly, allow to come when they want not only when invited through random sampling
- ◆ When reporting out test results
 - delineate on- vs off-campus students
 - employees vs. students
 - include reported off-campus positive test results
- ◆ Improved communications to the FSU community via the website and social media, too much email
- ◆ More effective communication strategies with key offices (Registrar, Student accounts, Financial Aid, Health Center etc.)
- ◆ Increase contact and support for students in isolation or quarantine on campus, more clear communication
- ◆ Stronger compliance with mask/face covering wearing in all locations and alternately penalties for noncompliance (students and employees)
- ◆ Review visitation policies in residence halls/on campus allowing for students who have tested negative to visit other buildings
- ◆ Dining: More remote dining options (especially for students with special dietary needs), enforce chair limits at tables, improve salad bar
- ◆ Increased opportunities for physical activity
- ◆ Increased cleaning in high traffic areas and busier bathrooms
- ◆ More hand sanitizer and wipes in common areas, encouraging students to wipe down their own desks or seating areas in each class

Looking Ahead

Employees, Students, Visitors and Vendors Updates

As described above, all of the protocols in place at the conclusion of the fall 2020 term and any new limits or restrictions issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts effecting University operations at the start of the spring 2021 term will be in place and enforced at the Framingham State University campus and locations. It has anticipated that during the duration of the term, these standards will change and the University will keep our practices updated to reflect these or other requirements.

Coordination of COVID-Related Activities

The COVID Oversight Team, the COVID Campus Analytics Team (CCAT) and the Testing Logistics Team will remain in place for the spring 2021 term and additional teams will continue to meet or will be added as needed. The objectives of the three noted teams are as follows:

COVID Oversight: Responsible for the overall review of practices and policies developed by the University to satisfy compliance with federal, state and local requirements and respond to recommendations from other COVID Teams. Recommendations to the President and Executive Staff are issued prior to adoption and implementation.

COVID Campus Analytics Team (CCAT): Responsible for the review of campus, local and statewide data indicators of the impact of COVID-19. Recommendations to the Oversight Team are issued for their review.

Testing Logistics Team: Responsible for the determination and implementation of COVID-19 testing to satisfy state requirements. May also share responsibility for coordination of COVID-19 vaccination efforts as this rollout develops.

Equity in the Foreground

National statistics tell us that the current pandemic including the resulting economic situation has affected persons and communities of color disproportionately to others within the United States. The effect on students of color must be considered in our response to our currently or previously enrolled students as well as our prospective students.

Currently the University is engaging in a review of its prior and 2020-2021 enrollment and retention data to identify concerns and develop strategies to address them. While the pandemic may have created unique problems due to the significant changes in the University's operations, other existing concerns may have been exacerbated. Being able to distinguish between pandemic related and non-related issues will be important in addressing student needs moving forward beyond this crisis period.

Prospective Students – Class of 2025

New undergraduate enrollees for the fall 2020 term were down substantially due no doubt to the effects of the pandemic. While First-Time First-Year (FTFY) accepts for fall 2020 were at an historic high (4577 students), the matriculated yield rate was at a historic low (13.41%). When the dust settled, 614 new FTFY students enrolled in Fall 2020; a 26.7% drop from the year prior. There was also a significant drop in new transfer student enrollment (276 in fall 2020 versus 380 in fall 2019).

Fortunately, the University did see enrollment growth in new degree-seeking graduate students and Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Licensure (PBTL) students in Fall 2020. New graduate students increased

31.5% (280 in Fall 2020 versus 213 in Fall 2019) and new PBTB students increased 153.8% (33 in Fall 2020 versus 13 in Fall 2019).

Specific to FTFY recruitment, the Admissions Office made the decision to greatly expand the number of prospective students at the top of the recruitment funnel through licensing College Board names (e.g., PSAT, SAT, AP) and expanding lead generation efforts (e.g., Carnegie Dartlett CollegeXpress). To date, the total prospects for Fall 2021 is 74,013 compared to 45,080 for Fall 2019. The Admissions Office employed predictive modeling to enhance communications to prospects using a variety of mediums (e.g., mail, email, digital advertising) in addition to remote visit opportunities (e.g., information sessions and one-on-one appointments with admissions counselors). Unfortunately, the cancellation of traditional external recruitment events (e.g., college fairs and high school visits), practical elimination of on-campus opportunities (e.g., in-person information sessions and in-person campus tours), and general apathy of high school students to engage in remote mediums (e.g., Zoom events) has produced a reduction of inquiries and applications from the larger prospect pool. This reduction is not unique to Framingham State University. Feedback from external sources (e.g., The Common Application and EAB) indicate that institutions across the country are also experiencing reductions in inquiries and applications for Fall 2021. At this date, the Admissions Office is running about 500 FTFY applications below this time last year.

While FTFY applications are down, the number of FTFY acceptances have run even and at times greater than last year. Greater focus has been given to enhancing yield activities. New this year, the Enrollment Marketing Team and Yield Strategies Team is working in concert with the Academic Deans and the Alumni Office to enhance engagement opportunities for accepted students. Three new communication strategies are being developed that include personalized postcards, embedded welcome videos, and opportunities for accepted students to connect with faculty, current students, and alumni. In addition, bi-weekly Zoom events are offered at 8pm on Wednesdays to connect accepted students and family members with the Vice President of Enrollment and Student Development and Dean of Enrollment Management between December to April. Work is also underway to enhance accepted student engagement leading up to the remote Rams Rising Accepted Student Event on Saturday, April 10.

Given the increase in new graduate and PBTB students, work is underway to better understand the Adult Learner Market and how best to reach non-traditional students with undergraduate and graduate recruitment strategies. In addition, the Admissions Office is also working in collaboration with the Registrar's Office to employ new technology that will help transfer students navigate the transfer credit evaluation process.

COVID-19 Testing & Vaccination

In the final release of the [Massachusetts Higher Education Control Plan](#) dated December 11, 2020, an increase in COVID-19 testing by post-secondary institutions was outlined:

The primary changes from prior releases that the University's testing team will accommodate in the spring semester include:

"In order to demonstrate acceptance of the Higher Education Testing Group's report and recommendations ("Developing an Integrated COVID-19 Testing Strategy: Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education in Massachusetts"), by January 1, 2021, an institution with students residing on campus should adopt and post online comprehensive protocols for arrival and surveillance testing that

align with the report. Concerning surveillance testing, while experience has shown that there is no single protocol for testing frequency that works in every environment, the report indicates that populations most at risk shall be tested every 2 to 7 days, with the outer limit being 12 days under the most favorable circumstances. Testing protocols and plans should be established in coordination with local public health officials and should be regularly updated to ensure compliance with current CDC and DPH requirements and guidelines and to reflect evolving testing technologies and methods.”

And

“All students living in campus housing who plan to leave campus during any period in which school is not in session should first receive a negative result from a COVID-19 test administered by the college within 72 hours of their planned departure. To the extent possible, residential colleges should also offer COVID-19 tests to students living off campus who plan to return home, within 72 hours of their planned departure. All students should be informed of the risks associated with going home without first receiving a negative COVID-19 test result. Residential students who test positive should immediately isolate in campus housing designated and supported for that purpose. Contact tracing for all students who test positive should begin immediately so that students who were in close contact can be provided appropriate quarantine housing and instructions. Students who previously tested positive for COVID-19 and are isolating in campus housing should remain in place until completing the 10-day isolation period, as prescribed by DPH guidance.

..... Students returning to a residential campus after any period in which school is not in session should be tested for COVID-19 within 72 hours prior to their planned return. Colleges should administer COVID-19 tests immediately to any returning student who returns to campus and has not been tested within 72 hours. Testing of returning students should apply to all students, whether they live on or off campus. Students who test positive should immediately isolate for at least 10 days, as prescribed by DPH guidance. Students returning to campus from another country or a state not designated as a lower-risk state by the Department of Public Health must quarantine for 10 days or produce a negative COVID-19 test result that has been administered within 72-hours prior to their arrival in Massachusetts. Students returning without a negative test result must remain in quarantine for 10 days after arrival or until they obtain a negative test result.”

Detailed information regarding the University’s testing plans and procedures may be found in the University’s COVID-19 Testing Plan.

As the University waits for determinations regarding the administration of one of the COVID-19 vaccines for the campus community, the University will remain vigilant with its testing protocols and be prepared to play whatever role is necessary to facilitate vaccine administration with public health partners as these plans are developed.

Learning & Teaching

Altered Academic Calendar

During the fall 2020 term, at the request of the President, the faculty governance committees considered and approved the request to delay the reopening date for the spring 2021 term from January 19 to the current January 25. Additionally, the traditional “spring break” week slated for March was eliminated with a few other slight adjustments intended to offset the traditional break period. These adjustments were made in an attempt to avoid what was predicted to be a peak period of the pandemic

and allow for the necessary classroom hours. Additionally, it was expected that what may have traditionally been a typical travel week for students and faculty in March would not be encouraged with no widespread vaccine administration having been completed prior to this period and the opportunity for virus spread still very high.

University Sponsored Travel

As a result of the pandemic all travel was restricted by the University other than local travel. Students were requested to return from international locations and further university sponsored travel, domestic or international, was suspended indefinitely.

Prior to anticipated resumption of University sponsored travel, a review and revision of existing practices that was initially underway at the beginning of the pandemic will be renewed and completed prior to the resumption of University sponsored travel.

Living

Athletics

Effective January 22, the Massachusetts State Collegiate Athletic Conference (MASCAC) Presidents made the difficult decision to cancel the fall-in-spring semester athletic conference competition. Fall and winter student-athletes will continue with training opportunities in order to support student-athletes physical and mental well-being. A decision on the spring sports season will be made by the MASCAC Presidents in February.

Conclusion

At this writing, early vaccine administration is underway and in spite of the pandemic claiming more lives each day, there is hope that by the continued use of mitigation techniques such as social distancing and mask wearing, and the use of COVID-19 surveillance testing that by the end of the spring 2021 term, we will as a community and a world have turned a corner towards addressing the widest scale public health crisis faced by this generation to date. We remain committed to these efforts and ever responsive to the changes that lie ahead.



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100 State Street PO Box 9101
Framingham, MA 01701-9101