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Ten considerations for reopening US higher education

Scenarios for reopening

July 2020

COVID-19 is, first and foremost, a global humanitarian challenge.

Thousands of health professionals are heroically battling the virus, putting their own lives at risk. Governments and industry are working together to understand and address the challenge, support victims and their families and communities, and search for treatments and a vaccine.

US higher-education institutions face uncertainty about reopening.

While recognizing the uncertainties inherent in discussing any timeline for returning to pre-outbreak normalcy, this document strives to lay out key considerations for reopening higher-education institutions.
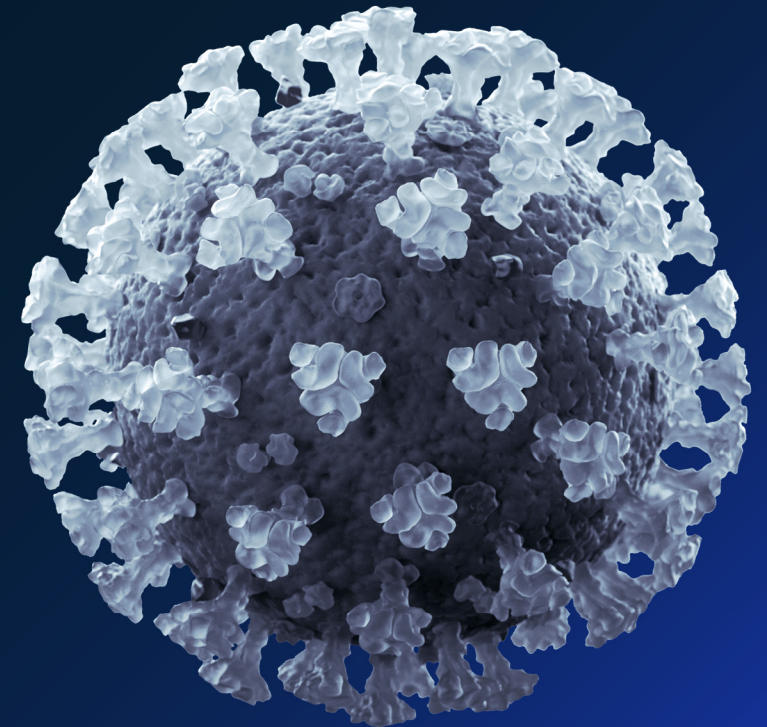
10 considerations for universities for reopening their campuses

1

Local conditions and health-system capacity

A) Relevant regulatory guidelines

B) Infection status

C) Social and economic context

D) Key work enablers (e.g., K–12 school systems, transit)

E) Other local university responses

2

Testing, tracing, and other protections

A) Testing

B) Contact tracing

C) Confirmed cases and quarantine policy

D) Other campus-wide health and safety policies

3

Protection for vulnerable populations

A) Health and safety

B) Learning enablement and equity

C) Financial challenges

D) External factors

4

University safeguards

A) Classroom and faculty

B) Research & student laboratories

C) Residential occupancy

D) Dining

E) Student activities

F) Offices

G) Athletics

5

Scenarios for reopening

A) Objectives and risks of reopening

B) Sequence of opening core activities in different scenarios

C) Restricting campus activity after reopening

D) Case examples

6

Maximizing mission in the next normal

A) Learning

B) Research

C) Service

D) Student life

E) Alumni

7

Detailed operational planning

A) Preparation required to reopen

B) Resources required (supplies, personnel)

8

Governance and compliance

A) Governance

B) Adherence and change management

C) Data tracking

9

Communications

A) Communicating in a crisis

B) Engaging university stakeholders

10

Financial impact and mitigation

A) Financial impact of each scenario

B) Mitigating actions to close the gap

5A: Each university can think about general reopening decisions in the context of its priorities

NOT EXHAUSTIVE

	Potential priorities	**Risks and considerations for reopening**
Educational mission	Effective teaching Provision of student experience/community Continuation of research Commitment to public service	Due to nature of their programs, students in certain areas (e.g., nursing, life sciences) may be learning less in remote settings and could take longer to earn their degrees Cutting-edge research and grants/publications could stagnate University may not be delivering on its mission to students
Equity	Equity of access and success	Economically disadvantaged students may learn less in remote settings
Health	Protection of mental and physical health of students, faculty, and staff Prevention of contagion in local community	Students with underlying health conditions may be at a greater disadvantage in reopening Premature reopening could result in contagion on and off campus
Economic well-being	Protection of faculty and staff livelihoods Contribution to local economy	Potential difficulty maintaining current faculty and staff without reopening Fear of losing top talent to other universities Local small businesses may go out of business
Institutional stability	Financial sustainability of institution	Budget shortfalls of X% possible without reopening Greater potential financial shock if premature reopening were to result in contagion and reclosure

5B: As universities think about reopening, they can consider 3 condition-based phases of returning

Universities can assess their priorities to determine which activities are mission-critical to return[1]

Phase 1:

Low-risk, mission-critical activities and programs resume in person as well as reopening preparation activities

Phase 2:

Additional limited activities resume in person with significant safeguards

Phase 3:

Most or all activities resume in person with fewer safeguards

Example activities:

Research, small lab courses, dorm cleaning

Example activities:

Graduate programs, grab-and-go campus dining

Example activities:

Full undergraduate program, athletics

Transition between phases will be **condition based and aligned with gating criteria** that each university defines *(see Section 1 for more details)*—some universities may skip phases or define additional ones.

Phase 1 could possibly begin when state/local **stay-at-home orders are lifted,** but universities will assess local conditions and public health guidance to determine if entering Phase 1 is appropriate.
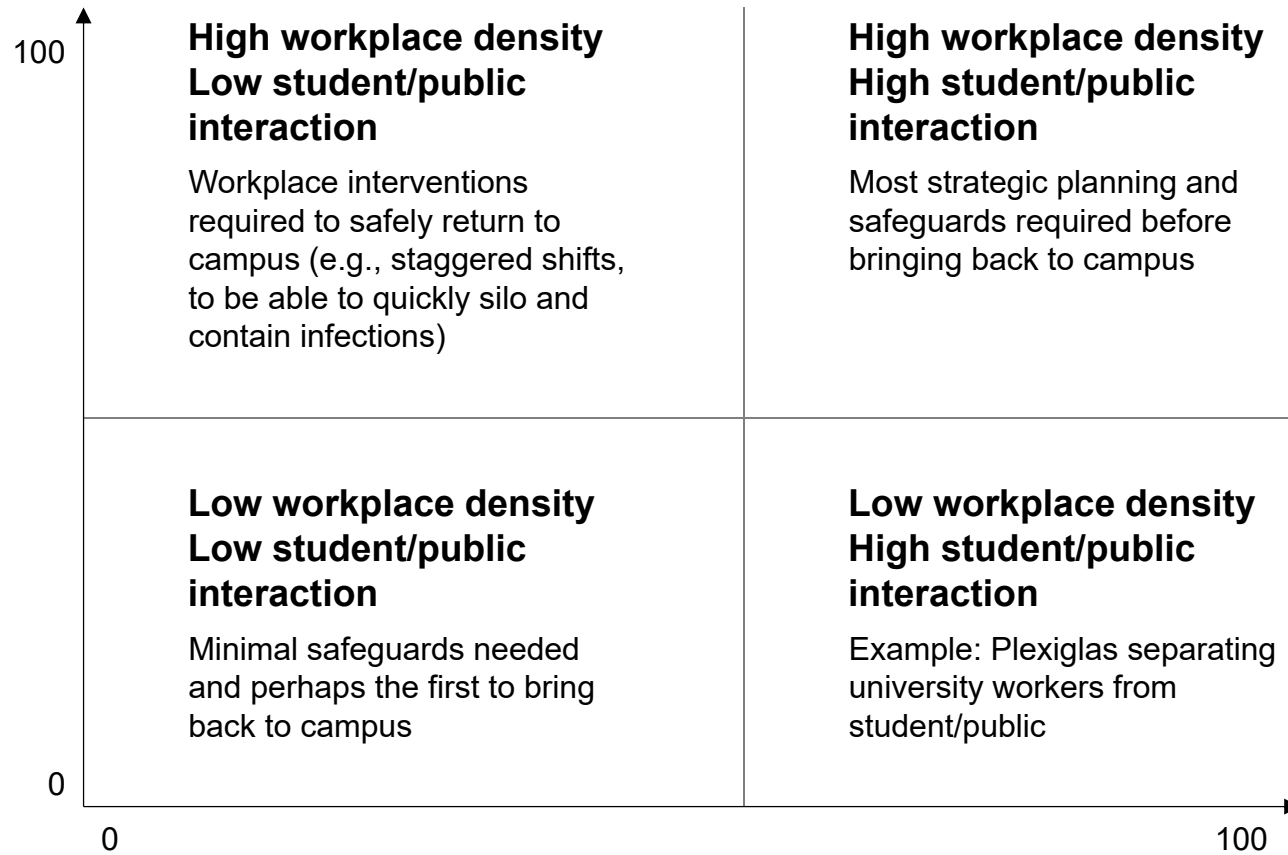
At each transition, universities will also assess faculty/staff/student willingness to return and ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place and vulnerable populations are protected.

1. Within state regulations and guidelines.

5B: To determine who to bring back on campus in each phase, universities can assess the risk of each occupation

Workplace density:

To what extent does this job require the worker to perform job tasks in close proximity to other people?

100

High workplace density Low student/public interaction

Workplace interventions required to safely return to campus (e.g., staggered shifts, to be able to quickly silo and contain infections)

High workplace density High student/public interaction

Most strategic planning and safeguards required before bringing back to campus

Low workplace density Low student/public interaction

Minimal safeguards needed and perhaps the first to bring back to campus

Low workplace density High student/public interaction

Example: Plexiglas separating university workers from student/public

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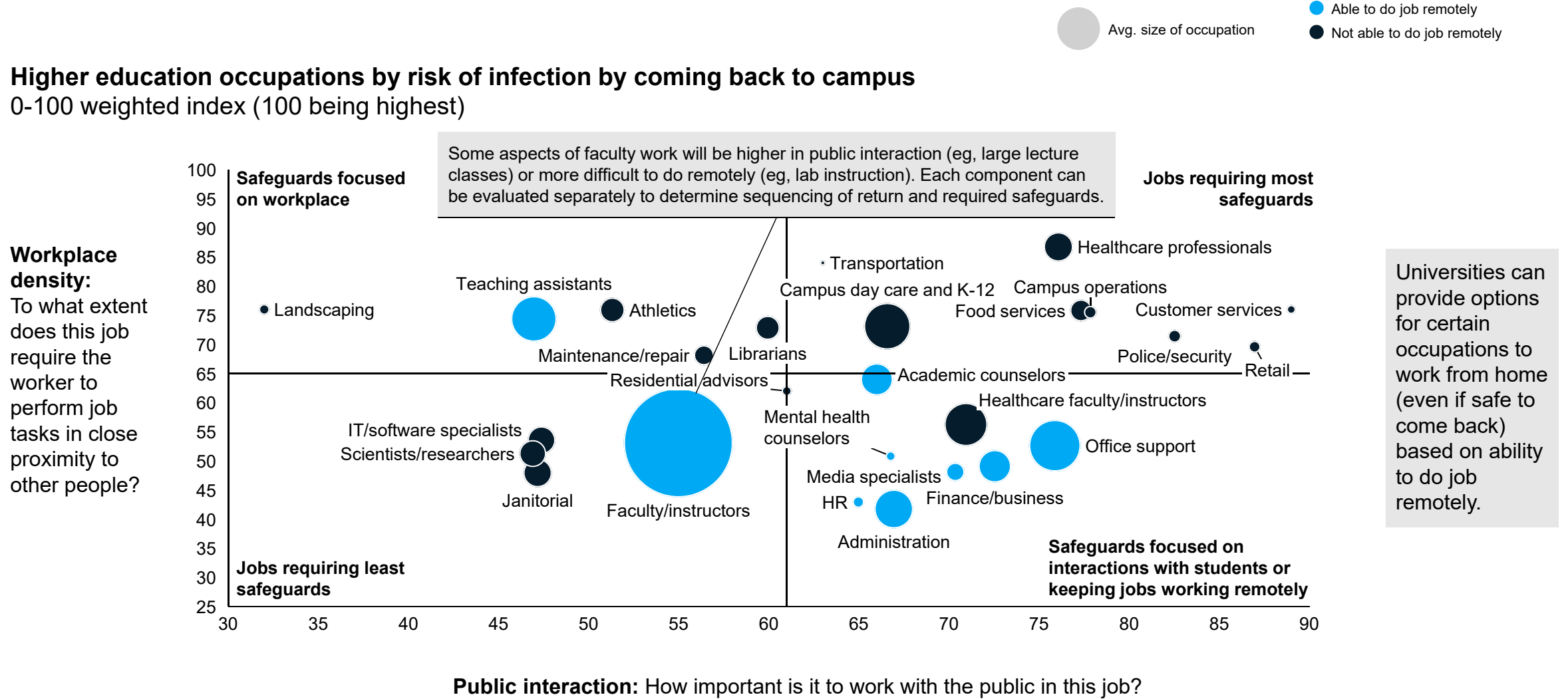0   100

Public interaction: How important is it to work with the public in this job?

Regardless of safety, there are some occupations that likely are not necessary on campus until students return (e.g., resident advisers).

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; Occupational Information Network; US Census Bureau: American Community Survey; McKinsey Global Institute

5B: Workplace density and external-facing nature of an occupation can help inform who can safely come back to work and when

◯ Avg. size of occupation

● Able to do job remotely

● Not able to do job remotely

Higher education occupations by risk of infection by coming back to campus
0-100 weighted index (100 being highest)

Workplace density:
To what extent does this job require the worker to perform job tasks in close proximity to other people?

Safeguards focused on workplace

Some aspects of faculty work will be higher in public interaction (eg, large lecture classes) or more difficult to do remotely (eg, lab instruction). Each component can be evaluated separately to determine sequencing of return and required safeguards.

Jobs requiring most safeguards

Healthcare professionals

Transportation

Campus day care and K-12   Campus operations

Landscaping   Food services

Teaching assistants   Customer services

Athletics   Police/security

Maintenance/repair   Librarians   Retail

Residential advisors

Academic counselors

Mental health counselors   Healthcare faculty/instructors

IT/software specialists   Office support

Scientists/researchers   Media specialists

Janitorial   HR   Finance/business

Faculty/instructors

Administration

Jobs requiring least safeguards

Safeguards focused on interactions with students or keeping jobs working remotely

Universities can provide options for certain occupations to work from home (even if safe to come back) based on ability to do job remotely.

Public interaction: How important is it to work with the public in this job?

5B: The most pressing decision for many universities is whether and when to bring students back in fall 2020

There are several archetypes of reopening that universities may consider

% of students on site

Reopening archetype

All students fully in person	On-time, full start	Campus reopens to all students and assumes normal operations in fall 2020
	Full reopen with delayed start or early end	Campus reopens to all students and resumes normal operations a few months after fall 2020, or begins on time (or early) and ends early (e.g., before Thanksgiving)
All students partially in person	Low-residency mode	Groups of students come to campus iteratively in low densities for a few weeks of rich experiences
	Students in residence, learning remotely	Residence halls reopen to all students but most (if not all) classes stay remote; certain types of high-risk extracurricular/social activities are restricted
Some students fully in person	Program/grade-level-based phasing	Campus reopens to certain grades/programs that are highest priority for in-person learning or working (e.g., PhDs, first-years, seniors, MBAs, etc.)
	Need/equity-based phasing	Those most in need of campus services (e.g., housing, tutoring) allowed to return by application
	Locality-based phasing	Commuter and local students allowed to take classes on campus; most or all residence halls stay closed
All students fully remote	On-time, remote start	Campus remains closed and all courses are taught remotely/online
	Structured gap year	Students allowed to propose project-based experiences when remote, and later requirements are fast-tracked

Universities will choose an archetype based on (1) the phase they expect to be in at reopening and (2) their priorities/operational capabilities

5B: Different contexts and conditions will inform decisions on the appropriate reopening archetype for fall 2020

Reopening archetype		Conditions that may need to be met
All students fully in person	**On-time, full start** **Full reopen with delayed start or early end**	Local external conditions (e.g., state/local guidelines, healthcare capacity, etc.) required for a safe reopening of campus are met Institution can procure and set up all necessary internal conditions (e.g., safeguards, policies, etc.) to safeguard student/community health Institution has adequate plans to accommodate those who cannot return (e.g., immunocompromised)
All students partially in person		All of the above for Archetype 1, but at smaller scale Campus experience, even with strong limitations, is a key part of delivering on the institution's mission
	Low-residency mode	Risk of contagion from increased travels can be sufficiently mitigated Curriculum/campus experience can be modified (e.g., modular) to accommodate hybrid model Institution has adequate plans to accommodate those who cannot return (e.g., immunocompromised)
	Students in residence, learning remotely	Classrooms are the biggest risk for transmission/contagion on campus Institution has adequate plans to accommodate those who cannot return (e.g., immunocompromised)
Some students fully in person		All of the above for Archetype 1, but at smaller scale There are certain subpopulations for which on-campus programming is mission critical and sufficiently low risk
	Program/grade level-based phasing	Classes/programs/degrees can be meaningfully separated into in-person vs. online classes
	Need/equity-based phasing	There are certain populations for which the campus provides critical services difficult to replicate at home Faculty is willing/able to prepare and deliver nearly all courses both online and in person
	Locality-based phasing	Faculty is willing and able to prepare nearly all courses both online and in person
All students fully remote		The potential risks of reopening outweigh the benefits of an in-person campus experience Institution can withstand a potentially significant drop in enrollment
	On-time, remote start	Institution has/will have the digital teaching and learning capabilities to support an entire remote semester There are ways to build campus community in a virtual environment
	Structured gap year	Students will be able to find meaningful ways to learn on their own in a physically distanced environment Institution can define ways to redesign credit requirements to support gap-year experiences

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5B: Updating the academic calendar can support each archetype and provide flexibility for announcing fall 2020 plans

NOT EXHAUSTIVE   **EXAMPLES CURRENT AS OF MAY 21, 2020**

Option	Considerations	Appropriate archetypes
No change to academic calendar	Earlier decision and clarity for students, faculty, and staff on fall 2020 plans	On-time, full start On-time, remote start Structured gap year
Modular or block calendar (e.g., 8- or 4-week blocks vs. semesters) COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY **B** 3 equal terms Module-based semester	Shortens the amount of time needed to complete a unit's worth of credit Allows more flexibility to change "phases" of reopening and/or to bring groups of students back to campus at different times Alleviates burden once (both students and faculty) of juggling multiple classes at once	Low-residency mode Program/grade-level-based phasing Need/equity-based phasing Locality-based phasing
Shortened semester (e.g., delayed start or ended before to Thanksgiving) RICE ND	Eliminating holidays and breaks minimizes off-campus travel and contact Shortens the amount of time needed to complete a unit's worth of credit Could provide additional time to make decisions for either fall 2020 or spring 2021	Students in residence, learning remotely Full reopen with delayed start or early end

Source: Columbia University; Beloit College; Rice University; Notre Dame University

5C: Restricting campus activity after reopening is not a binary choice, but rather a multi-phased decision akin to a 'dimmer' switch

Considerations

External:

Relevant regulatory guidelines and infection and health system status

Internal:

Infection and health system status on campus

Adherence on campus and qualitative factors

Restricting campus activity

Restricting campus activity is not a binary decision and can be considered similar to a "dimmer switch," in which different degrees of campus restriction can be enabled based on trigger points across external and internal considerations (see following page for examples).

Universities can adopt various models to restrict campus activity to differing degrees before instituting a fully virtual model. These models include the following (not exhaustive):

- Making classes over x size virtual again

- Banning university gatherings over x size

- Increasing consequences for nonadherence

5C: There are three areas that universities can monitor to assess what would warrant restricting campus activity if needed

Consideration	Criteria	Examples of key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor
External: Relevant regulatory guidelines and infection and health system status	Updates to county, state, and national (the White House's "Opening Up American Again") guidelines and mandates, which will be based on CDC guidance and the following: • Status of contagion at a regional, state, and national level • Status of resources and infrastructure to combat contagion (eg, PPE, health system capacity, testing and tracing) • Compliance of greater public with COVID-19 protocols (eg, group gatherings, social distancing) Re-closing status of neighboring universities	County, state, and national-level contagion metrics, such as the following: • Cases confirmed • Flu-like illnesses • COVID-related deaths • Healthcare worker infection rates • Discharge vs admission rates Status of resources at county/state/national levels • Beds/acute care beds per 10,000 adults • PPE for healthcare workers • Testing/contract tracing capacities Public announcements from neighboring universities
Internal: Infection and health system status on campus	Spread of infection on-campus Status of resources and infrastructure to combat contagion on campus, such as the following: • University health system capacity • PPE resources • Testing and tracing resources	University/local health system contagion metrics • Cases confirmed • Flu-like illnesses • COVID-related deaths • Healthcare worker infection rates • Discharge vs admission rates Status of resources at university health system • Beds/acute care beds per 10,000 adults • PPE for healthcare workers • Testing/contract tracing capacities
Internal: Adherence on campus and qualitative factors	Adherence of university community (eg, students, staff, faculty, and local community members) with COVID-related policies and procedures, as well as qualitative factors such as stakeholder reactions to reopening status and recent developments	On-campus COVID-related citations or arrests Results of frequent pulse surveys with faculty, staff, and students Media and public reaction; parent and alumni reaction to reopening status and most recent developments

Universities can develop dashboards to actively monitor the situation and track the trend of important KPIs.

In strategy-setting, universities can denote specific trigger levels per KPI that would warrant re-shutting down.

Please refer to the compliance and enforcement section for further detail on governance and adherence.
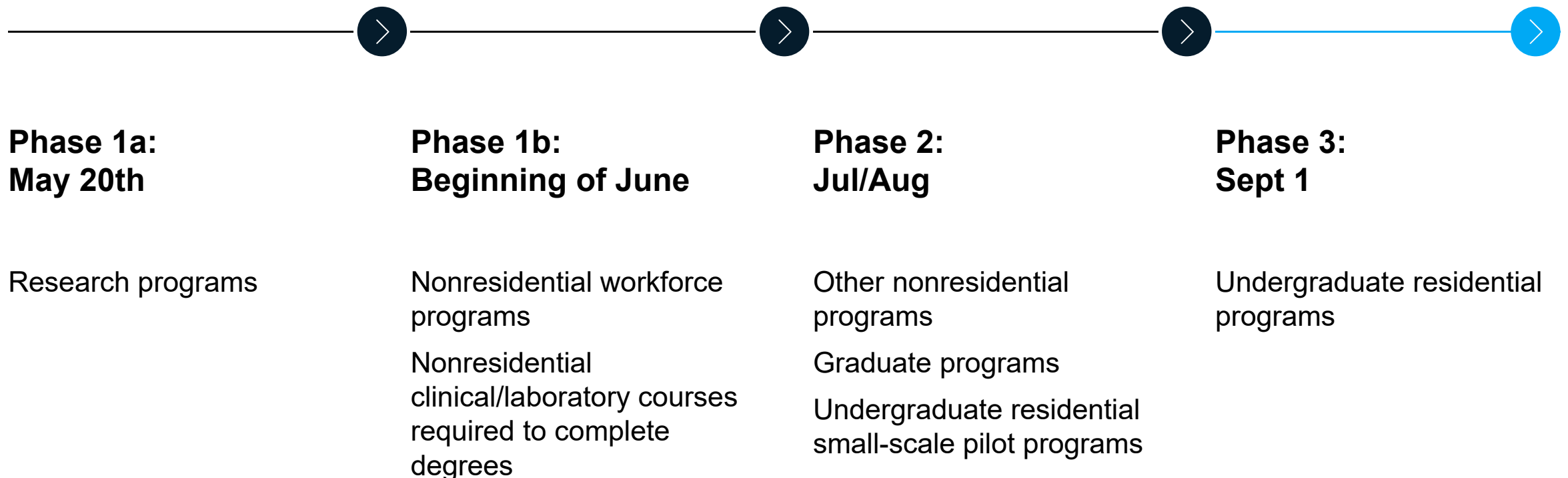
5D: The state of Connecticut has provided guidance for universities to reopen, including gating criteria, phases, and safeguards (1/2)

Universities will build individual reopening plans based on the state's guidance.

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY AS OF MAY 7, 2020

Earliest dates shown for each phase; institutions may open any time thereafter

Exact timing will depend on meeting public health criteria

Phase 1a:
May 20th

Phase 1b:
Beginning of June

Phase 2:
Jul/Aug

Phase 3:
Sept 1

Research programs

Nonresidential workforce programs

Nonresidential clinical/laboratory courses required to complete degrees

Other nonresidential programs

Graduate programs

Undergraduate residential small-scale pilot programs

Undergraduate residential programs

5D: The state of Connecticut has provided guidance for universities to reopen, including gating criteria, phases, and safeguards (2/2)

Universities will build individual reopening plans based on the state's guidance.

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY AS OF MAY 7, 2020

Public health guidance for colleges and universities in Connecticut

Guidance element	Specific guidance
Social distancing	6 feet of separation whenever possible
Density of classrooms, dining halls, and other areas where groups congregate	6 feet of separation whenever possible
Density of residence halls	Roommates and suitemates treated as a family unit; 6-foot spacing preserved with other dorm occupants {Density of bathroom use TBD} Students with pre-existing health conditions assigned to single-occupancy rooms
Personal protective equipment	All faculty, staff, and students required to wear masks
Disinfection	Hand sanitizer available at entrances to all buildings, classrooms, and dining halls Disposable wipes available in all bathrooms, classrooms, and other shared facilities (eg copy machines, coffee stations, etc) for wiping down surfaces touched before and after every use Frequent hand-washing and frequent deep cleaning of bathrooms and other high-touch areas
Travel	Avoid unnecessary travel domestically and internationally
Faculty/staff work from home	Whenever possible
Faculty/staff advised to stay home	Initially, those 65 and over and/or those with high risk factors
Screening	Faculty, staff, and students monitor their own symptoms and report them to healthcare providers

5D: Vanderbilt University resumed limited research operations on May 18th as part of a phased approach

The university has released clear protocols for campus operations to ensure safety.

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY AS OF MAY 7, 2020

VANDERBILT
UNIVERSITY

" The reopening of universities, including Vanderbilt, is not specifically noted in the Nashville plan. That is because universities, like ours, cannot easily be defined by a single function. We are **complex operational entities – almost like a city unto ourselves and home to many different functions**. We are an event site; our dining facilities are like restaurants; our in-person classes could be considered akin to K–12 schools; and so much more. And we know that as a residential university, we have unique needs.

– Susan R. Wente
Interim Chancellor and Provost

The "phase one **resumption of specific, limited, on-campus operations and activities will begin May 18** and will be tailored to our own unique density, operations and other considerations as a residential education institution…. The first operations to begin ramping up during the university's phase one will be on-campus research activities that cannot be conducted remotely."

"We also have developed detailed, **rigorous sets of campus-wide operating protocols** that will be put in place across campus. Some will be across all aspects of the university campus, and others will be specific to unique areas (such as research environments)."

The phase one operating protocols include the following:

Physical distancing

Density limits in all work spaces and building areas

Face masks

A system for monitoring and reporting symptoms of illness

Event and gathering limitations and other safety precautions

5D: Duke University's 'Guide for Returning to the Workplace' outlines health and safety guidance for on-campus work

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY AS OF MAY 7, 2020

Phased staffing: Duke will phase in a return of staff in a coordinated process to ensure appropriate social distancing, availability of PPE (personal protective equipment) and testing capabilities for COVID-19. Duke will assess expanded staffing based on mission-critical operations, ability to control and manage specific work environments, and necessity to access on-site resources.

Personal disinfection: While custodial crews will continue to clean office and work spaces based on CDC guidelines, additional care should be taken to wipe down commonly used surfaces. Before starting work and before you leave any room in which you have been working, you must wipe down all work areas with EPA-registered 60% alcohol solution. This includes any shared-space location or equipment (eg copiers, printers, computers, A/V and other electrical equipment, coffee makers, desks and tables, light switches, door knobs, etc).

Meals: If dining on campus, you should wear your mask or face covering until you are ready to eat and then replace it afterward. Eating establishments must meet requirements to allow at least 6 feet of distance between each customer, including lines and seating arrangements. Individuals should not sit facing one another. Staff are encouraged to take food back to their office area or eat outside, if this is reasonable for your situation.

5D: Rice University has announced a gradual process of reopening, with plans to fully reopen in August with modifications

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY AS OF MAY 7, 2020

> **We are cautiously optimistic that we will begin the fall semester on schedule in mid-August with all students who are able returning to campus.** From now until then, depending on evolving facts and government rules, we will plan a gradual process of reopening. At each stage, however, we must be open to re-evaluating our plans as the facts and circumstances surrounding COVID-19 change.
>
> —David Leebron, President
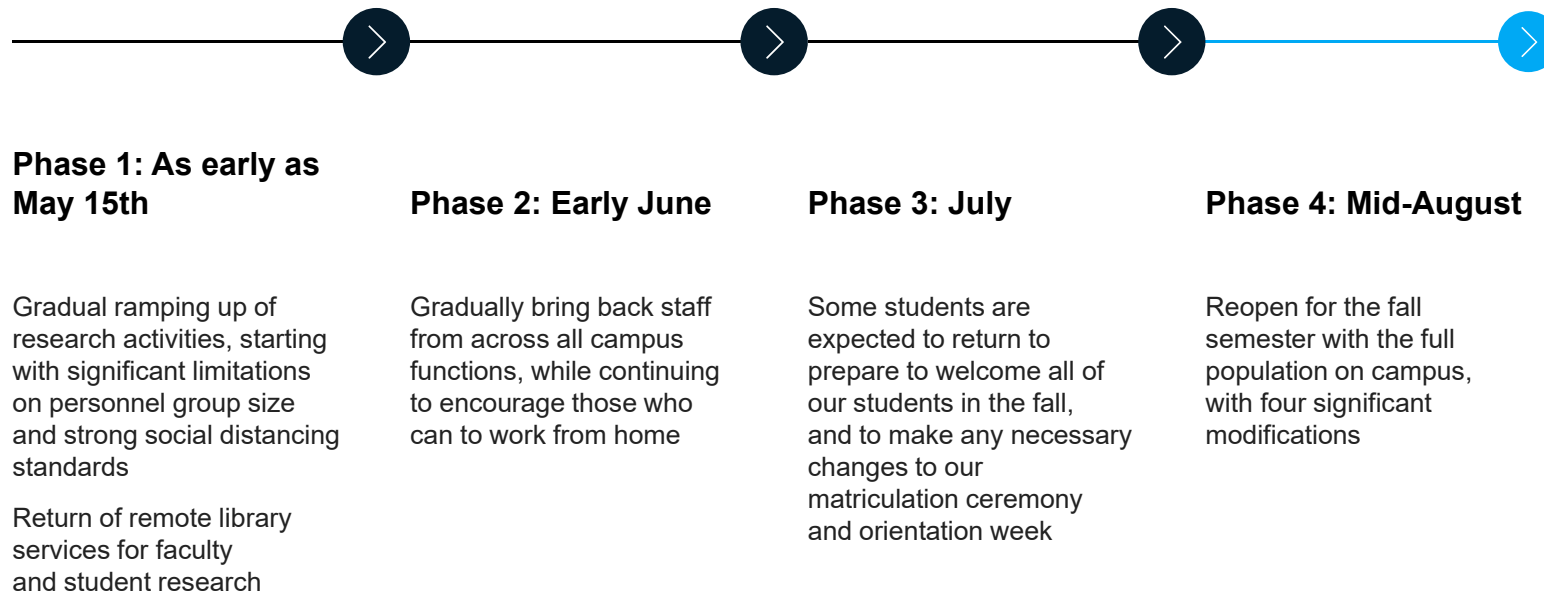
Modifications to fall 2020:

1. All classes, with very limited exceptions, will be delivered in dual mode: available both on campus and remotely at the same time.

2. We are taking steps to shorten the number of weeks in the fall semester, enabling us to end classes before Thanksgiving.

3. We will be adopting additional safety and social distancing measures across our campus community.

4. We will need additional flexibility, especially for international students. We will be more open than in the past to allowing new students to start mid-year or defer their enrollment.

Phase 1: As early as May 15th

Gradual ramping up of research activities, starting with significant limitations on personnel group size and strong social distancing standards

Return of remote library services for faculty and student research

Phase 2: Early June

Gradually bring back staff from across all campus functions, while continuing to encourage those who can to work from home

Phase 3: July

Some students are expected to return to prepare to welcome all of our students in the fall, and to make any necessary changes to our matriculation ceremony and orientation week

Phase 4: Mid-August

Reopen for the fall semester with the full population on campus, with four significant modifications

5D: The University of Denver's 'Phased Campus Access and Support Plan' has defined gating criteria and protocols for 5 phases

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY AS OF MAY 7, 2020

Phase one – March 16 to May 8

Population: On-campus essential personnel only

Only on-campus essential workers were allowed on site. This phase began before Denver's stay-at-home order went into effect, and ended on May 8, when the order expired.

Phase two – May 9 until at least May 26

Population: No more than 20% of faculty and staff and no more than 50% of people per building

During this phase, we will begin slowly and gradually working toward the goal of having 20 percent of our employees on campus.

Phase three – dates TBD

Population: 50%

Timeframe will depend on Colorado and Denver guidelines and on what we learn during our own phase two. Our goal in this phase will be to work slowly and safely toward having 50 percent of employees on campus, with everyone following best practices for physical distancing, health checks, and other precautions.

Phase four – dates TBD

Population: 100%

Again, we cannot predict the timeframe, but in this phase, our goal will be to continue working prudently toward full strength of our workforce and 100 percent of employees on campus.

Phase five – dates TBD

No restrictions

In this phase we will enjoy unrestricted travel, no limits on group sizes, open access to buildings, and other "normal" activity. We all are eager to imagine this phase will be possible sooner than later, but again, we will reach phase five only once we can ensure the health and safety of our community members.

Gating criteria:

Categories* (protocols)	PHASE I	PHASE II	PHASE III	PHASE IV	PHASE V
BROAD UNIVERSITY-WIDE Areas					
Jurisdiction Notices	NCR: Phase I: Slow the Spread CDC: Substantial Community Spread City of Denver: Stay at Home Order State of Colorado: "Stay at Home" Essential Personnel Only	NCR: Phase II: Reopen CDC: Moderate Community Spread City of Denver: Level TBD State of Colorado: "Safer at Home" CDPHE face covering order DDPHE face covering order 20% Launch	NCR: Phase II: Reopen CDC: Moderate Community Spread City of Denver: Level TBD State of Colorado: 50% Launch	NCR: Phase III: Lift Restrictions CDC: Minimal Community Spread City of Denver: TBD State of Colorado: Level TBD 100% Launch	NCR: Phase IV: Rebuild CDC: No Community Spread City of Denver: TBD State of Colorado: TBD
Trigger to Move Up or Down	**Primary:** Jurisdiction Change in Status **Secondary:** Change or outbreak on Campus				

CAMPUS COVID-19
Phases of Reopening Issued 5.11.2020
UNIVERSITY of DENVER

Listed protocols for each phase:

Travel
Staffing levels
Human Resources and Inclusive Community and leave policies
Reduction of density and group size ratios
Building access
Visitors
Health requirements
PPE
Classes

Food service/Sodexo support
Disinfection
Cleaning
Personal/lab space self-cleaning
Mail and shipping/receiving
Health and counseling operations
Research
University libraries

Campus recreation
Athletics
Events
Summer conferences
Parking
IT/AV
Housing and residential education; student housing
Greek housing
Fisher Center
Ricks School
Clinics

5D: Norway has approved some reopening for higher education—the University of Oslo has released policies and training to return

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY AS OF MAY 7, 2020

University of Oslo:[2] Gradual reopening for both staff and students starting May 11, with all teaching and exams still digital through semester

Partial access to campuses beginning April 27th for students and staff who depend on labs and technical equipment, and full access beginning May 11

> We greatly look forward to the campus and UiO's buildings being filled by students and staff again next week! At the same time, we must ensure that this is done in a safe and sound way. This means that not everyone can come back on Monday, since we are preparing for a gradual opening, says Rector Svein Stølen.

Examples of university policies

All staff and students must complete a digital infection prevention course before returning to campus.

Increased cleaning in common areas and toilets only.

Infection control rules:

- **Wash your hands**
- **Keep at least 1 meter distance**
- **Stay home if you are sick**

Employees in risk groups, or who live with people in risk groups, or those who want and manage to work from home, should still be allowed to do so.

Staff and students are encouraged to walk or cycle and avoid rush hour traffic if they have to travel by public transport.

Semester exchange is cancelled for the autumn semester 2020.

5D: New Zealand is preparing to allow higher ed to reopen, but most universities plan to remain online until July
The country has defined four alert levels for reopening, with guidance for universities in each phase.

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY AS OF MAY 7, 2020.

Most universities will still not reopen until July even though the government has indicated they can start again from the Monday after the country moves down to alert level 2.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has announced that early childhood education, schools and tertiary education will all be free to reopen at level 2—possibly as early as May 18 if the cabinet decides next Monday that it is safe to move down a level on the four-step COVID-19 alert scale.

However Auckland, AUT, and Massey Universities all say that they will keep teaching online-only for the rest of this half-year, with few exceptions.

Auckland University communications manager Lisa Finucane said: "Our stated position is we will remain in remote teaching and learning mode until at least the start of semester 2 (July 27), regardless of the government's alert level.

"Details still need to be confirmed; however, it is likely that a move to level 2 will allow us to resume more of our research activity and to open up additional study spaces and other student support services on campus, as long as health risks are minimized and we remain compliant with government requirements," she said.

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

Summary of University of Auckland's position:

- **Alert level 4**: Remote learning and closed campuses as currently

- **Alert level 3**: As above, but with the possibility of some permitted teaching and learning activities on campus if we are confident that level 3 is stable and sustainable (applies to semester 1 and 2); research activity permissible when the deans approve if level 3 operating protocols can be met

- **Alert level 2**: Campuses re-opened for all activities (but no earlier than beginning of semester 2) but with physical distancing and other precautionary measures

- **Alert level 1**: Same as for level 2