



Tab 2 COVID-19 Update

Coordinating Board for Higher Education
March 3, 2021

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 is still prevalent in Missouri and throughout the world. COVID-related challenges have impacted higher education institutions. To help institutions mitigate the effects of COVID on campuses, the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) began convening college leaders for weekly online meetings on March 17, 2020, and have worked closely with institution leaders since that time. During the 2020-2021 academic year, no higher education institution in Missouri has had to “shut down” campus due to a COVID outbreak; additionally, institutions have been able to serve as critical resources in their communities during this time.

Higher Education as a Resource

In the early stages of the state’s COVID-19 vaccination efforts, many institutions have served as both vaccination providers and vaccination event hosts (both distributing to eligible individuals on campus and within the broader community). In many communities, institutions are a critical piece of vaccinating communities, providing physical space capabilities and resources, including personnel, to support vaccination efforts. In research, several institutions have tested the effectiveness of BinaxNOW tests as compared to PCR tests, and are presenting these findings to the state’s Fusion Cell. Further, several institutions also researched the classroom spread of COVID-19 in the fall, and are compiling the research findings. Staff at institutions with research and healthcare facilities have been integral in every element of the state’s response.

Information-Sharing

DHEWD staff continue to bring higher education leaders together weekly over the fall and spring semesters to help them prepare to keep campuses safe for students, faculty, and staff this semester and beyond. These weekly meetings, open to any staff in higher education institutions, provide an opportunity to disseminate information, provide expert presentations, highlight the approaches different kinds of institutions are taking to shared challenges, identify and answer frequently asked questions, and develop a sense of community. Regular attendance at these meetings is around 70-80 participants each week. Additionally, the DHEWD sends out a weekly email communication to higher education institutions with the latest COVID news and updates.

CURRENT STATUS

Students, faculty, and staff have returned to campus in some capacity at every institution. Many students take a combination of online and seated classes, with in-person instruction prioritized for the kinds of classes that can be taught most effectively in that format. Institution leaders are monitoring the number of positive cases on campus, trends in the COVID variants, in addition to other factors that are relevant to decision-making around moving to online instruction, implementation of mitigation strategies, and long-term planning for campus safety.

NEXT STEPS

DHEWD staff will continue to meet with higher education leaders and staff as long as the need exists. DHEWD staff are working with the Department of Health and Senior Services and other executive branch agencies to bring COVID updates and expert information to institutions as it becomes available.

RECOMMENDATION

This is an information item only.

NO ATTACHMENTS