



Administration & Conference Center
St. Thomas Campus

University of the Virgin Islands



Fall 2020 and Spring
2021 Reopening Plan



Melvin H. Evans Center
Albert A. Sheen Campus



COVID-19 and Higher Education: The University of the Virgin Islands' Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 Plan

Introduction

One of the critical decisions for colleges and universities across the nation, and in certain parts of the world, is whether they will resume in-person instruction and have students live on campus in the Fall. UVI is no exception and contained within this report is the Administration's recommendations for a path forward. The recommendations were presented to the Board of Trustees on June 20, 2020. At that meeting, the Board approved the recommendations with suggested changes and input received from the Board and the University's shared governance constituency groups.

A Taskforce of 27 individuals ([UVI COVID-19 Taskforce](#)) across both campuses has been meeting, researching and discussing the University's response to COVID-19 for many months. Their work serves as a basis for these recommendations, though the Administration also received input from the Academic Deans, and the President's Cabinet clarified and added to the Taskforce's recommendations.

Since the pandemic occurred, the University has been responding in a manner that attempts to accomplish two important goals. The first goal is to be guided by established and accepted information and insights which will enable us to curtail the risk of spreading the virus and thus preserve the health and safety of our students, employees, and the public. The second goal is to ensure that our academic mission and work can proceed so that students can achieve their academic dreams in a supportive and creative manner. These two goals are embedded in the

recommendations contained in this report. There is no perfect solution in addressing this health and educational crisis, and institutions of higher education are taking various approaches. Based on a survey from the American Council of Education, ([ACE Study](#)) it appears that most colleges and universities are likely to resume some form of in-person instruction in the Fall, however with numerous restrictions, limitations and protective measures.

These recommendations are premised on the following guiding principles:

1. The health and safety of our students, employees and the public must be considered in all actions and decisions.
2. The University's policies and decisions will be based on local government policies and conditions in the Territory regarding COVID-19, especially the guidelines and advice of the Virgin Islands Department of Health (VIDOH).
3. The information and guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) must be incorporated into all recommendations and should continue to guide the University's policies.
4. If circumstances in the Territory regarding COVID-19 dramatically change, these recommendations will be revisited and changed accordingly.

The approach the Administration is proposing can be summarized as a gradual resumption of in-person instruction, with numerous restrictions, limitations and preventative measures in the Fall, and the relaxation of some of the restrictions in the Spring if warranted by existing conditions and experiences from the Fall. (See attached [Reopening Phases](#))

The [Recommendations](#) fall into seven categories. There is information in the appendices that support or provide background information for certain recommendations. The seven categories are:

1. The Campus Environment
2. The Work Environment
3. Instruction and Classes
4. Campus Housing
5. Facilities and Events
6. Taking Care of Everyone
7. Stay Informed!

The academic instruction recommendation is a mixed modality approach. There will be a combination of in-person and remote instruction. The recommendation

contains some examples of mixed modality approaches, but assumes that the Provost, Academic Deans, faculty, and support staff will be creative and innovative in determining the appropriate approaches.

Some recommendations will require the development of more specific guidelines, which must be in place by the start of the Fall semester. Other recommendations will require physical enhancements to the work environment and the acquisition of additional equipment and devices. The Administration is committed to securing the funding to support the implementation of these initiatives, despite the current financial challenges. The recommendations related to testing and temperature screening are requiring the University to venture into areas that have not been the domain of higher education. The surrounding conditions have dramatically changed requiring the expansion of the boundaries of the University's operations.

The risks associated with COVID-19 cannot be eliminated. These recommendations are an attempt to significantly reduce those risks as the University fulfills its mission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

COMMUNICATION

COVID-19 Guidelines and Protocols will be strategically posted and distributed across both campuses, as well as on the University's website, digital bulletin boards and social media platforms and pages. Meticulous adherence to public health practices including hand hygiene, physical distancing, proper cough/sneeze etiquette, frequent disinfection of common and high traffic areas, symptom assessment, testing and/or temperature checks, and appropriate face coverings in public is the campus environment's new normal.

HEALTHY HYGIENE PRACTICES

The use of face masks, cloth face coverings or face shields, properly worn (over nose and mouth), will be required while individuals are on campus. Religious veils such as a hijab is acceptable. Face masks and facial coverings are also expected to be worn in public settings and in common areas, particularly where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain. Face masks and facial coverings are also expected to be worn when in direct contact with customers or members of the public. Face masks are preferred when on campus, however certain other facial coverings such as neck warmers, buffs, scarves, head ties/wraps, and bandanas are acceptable.

Face masks and facial coverings with demeaning, inappropriate or derogatory logos, language or imagery including profanity, racist, sexist and other offensive script, weapons, alcohol, and illegal drugs and related use are not permissible. Under no circumstances are ski-masks or other things that cover the entire face permissible.

Students and employees are responsible for obtaining and cleaning face masks, facial coverings and face shields. Each person has a responsibility for their health and for that of others within the campus environment. To assist with meeting this requirement, the University will provide one reusable face mask to its employees and students.

Some employees or students may have appropriately documented medical conditions or a disability that limit their ability to wear a face mask. Such accommodations must be pre-approved and will be addressed on an as requested basis. Where possible, a face shield or pre-approved modified face mask or facial covering should be worn.

Masks, gloves, and other protective equipment will be provided for essential staff who are required to clean, repair and sanitize the campuses. Hand sanitizers will be placed at high traffic areas and in each office to support good hygiene practices. Healthy Hygiene flyers will also be posted across both campuses.

CLEAN & DISINFECT

Custodial staff will increase cleaning and disinfecting high-touch areas, such as soda machines, snack machines, door handles, etc. in addition to regular routine cleaning. Disinfecting wipes will be provided in high traffic areas so that commonly used surfaces can be wiped down frequently. Enhanced cleaning protocols for facility rentals will also be required, as detailed in the new guidelines and protocols contained in attachment (See attached [Facilities & Events](#) protocols).

The University is aware of growing research that suggests that air conditioning in offices and other indoor settings may pose a risk in the spread of COVID-19. As part of its enhanced protocols, the University will increase the frequency of cleaning air conditioning vents and the replacement cycle of High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

In adherence to the social distancing guidelines, individuals congregating in all indoor and outdoor gatherings, classes, waiting rooms and lobbies will be required to maintain a distance of at least six feet (6ft) from each other. This may include reducing the number of seats in certain areas and spaces. Furniture will be rearranged to adhere to the physical distance required and should not be moved or rearranged by users. Group gatherings outdoors should be limited.

UNIVERSITY VEHICLES

Individuals who are using University vehicles that transport multiple individuals are required to clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces before and after each use. When there are multiple occupants in the vehicle, the use of acceptable face masks, facial coverings or face shields is recommended.

With regards to the campus shuttle on the St. Thomas Campus, the passenger capacity will be reduced to one half of the previously allowable capacity. Face masks, facial coverings or face shields will be required on the shuttle. Cleaning and disinfecting of commonly touched surfaces in the shuttle at the beginning and

end of each shift and throughout the day between transporting each group of passengers will occur.

Users are reminded to practice safe social distancing when possible and good hygiene etiquette including hand washing and use of hand sanitizer.

2. The Work Environment

OFFICE SPACE

The University will continue to monitor and follow CDC guidance on safety measures. (See attached [CDC Information Flyers](#).) Offices will be required to adhere to the social distancing requirement of 6ft for employees. In shared offices, where 6ft distancing cannot be achieved, staggered work hours and/or days will be required. Teleworking will be permitted in certain circumstances with the approval of direct supervisors and Component heads. Factors to be considered include health vulnerabilities, childcare responsibilities, and other factors to be further identified and developed into a coherent set of guidelines.

In service areas where social distancing may be difficult to achieve, for example the library, registrar's office, health services, cafeteria service line, snack bar, bookstore and other high-volume reception areas, shield barriers will be installed to help achieve physical distancing and safety. (See attached [Sample Shields](#).)

In line with guidelines for safety in the workplace, employees are required to maintain a sign-in sheet of all office visits. Visitors are required to wear face masks/facial coverings and maintain social distancing requirements at all times.

BUSINESS PROCESSES

Employees are encouraged to continue hosting more virtual meetings and minimize in-person meetings as much as possible. To reduce or minimize face-to-face conversations, employees should inform others of their office hours and availability and students and co-workers should make appointments prior to an in-person office visit. Social distancing policies should also be followed in all common areas on campus.

NEW EMPLOYEES

The Human Resources office will resume recruitment activity. New employee orientation sessions will be conducted online.

HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES

Employees who are sick are required to stay home and utilize their sick leave benefits. The donated sick leave policy will continue for those who exhaust their sick leave. Employees are encouraged to consult with and visit their physician if they have symptoms of COVID-19. If tested for COVID-19, employees should alert their direct supervisor so that preliminary precautions can be put in place.

During the Fall semester, business travel will be restricted. Guidelines will be developed before the Fall to indicate when limited exceptions will be made. Individuals returning from business or personal travel outside of the Territory are encouraged to check with their physician or other health care providers before resuming normal work or academic activities.

3. Instruction and Classes

CLASSROOMS & INSTRUCTION SPACES

Classroom capacities on the campuses will be adjusted in the Fall semester to comply with the social distancing and safety precautions. On the Albert A. Sheen Campus, overall seating capacity will be reduced from 840 to 259, and on St. Thomas Campus from 911 to 276. (See detailed analysis for [Room Capacity](#).)

MIXED MODALITY

The Academic Deans and faculty are asked to develop a system for offering courses that can accommodate the needs of our students. Mixed modality approaches will include a combination of in-person, remote, flipped instruction, video-conference or a combination thereof. The following are a few examples of mixed modality approaches but are not intended to limit the ideas and creativity of the faculty.

- In-person classes will occur for those courses where the class size fits within the reduced classroom capacity.
- Classes that exceed the capacity can be taught remotely, or in a hybrid manner that can include flipping the classes, with cohorts of students attending in person on different days.
- A class could be divided into cohorts where a portion of the class is in-person and the remainder are participating from a distance. The cohorts can be

reversed weekly or at some other predetermined frequency. This may have to be universally coordinated, so that students do not find themselves in different cohorts for different classes (e.g. maybe by last names). Special consideration will be given to out of Territory students who may be unable to be present for the in-person portion of the class.

- A course may be offered remotely, but the lab is conducted in-person.
- Using existing video conference equipment, a course can be offered across both campuses with each room complying with the social distancing requirements.
- Faculty members and students who have health vulnerabilities should be provided with the option and flexibility to carry out their teaching and academic responsibilities in a remote or virtual environment.
- Technology training for faculty and students will continue to be available in the Fall 2020 semester.

Additional equipment will be needed for some of these examples, and the Administration is in the process of securing this equipment. In addition, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning will work with faculty to ensure that these mixed modalities are occurring in a pedagogically sound manner. Faculty are encouraged to attend training offered on the use of Blackboard and general technology.

IN-PERSON ATTENDANCE

The use of appropriate face masks, facial coverings, and face shields are required to be worn on campus including when entering and exiting classrooms. While in classrooms, students seated at 6ft physical distancing may remove masks during the class session but must put them back on if moving around in the class and unable to maintain 6ft social distancing. Faculty members are not required to wear a mask while lecturing and speaking in class if physical distance protocols are met.

The safety and well-being of our campus community is our highest priority. As a result, the use of appropriate face masks, facial coverings and face shields will be enforced. After reasonable attempts have been made by faculty to get students to comply with this policy, should students fail to comply with this request, Campus Security will be asked to assist with escorting students outside of the classroom

LABS

Capacity in the labs and study areas will be reduced to adhere to social distancing guidelines. Enrolled students will be allowed to use computer labs or other approved study locations on campus for a two-hour block. All users will be required to sign-in and wipe down areas prior to use. Users with flu-like symptoms will not be allowed on campus. Protocol for wiping down areas and relevant materials will be provided by the University.

COMMUNICATION

Faculty are encouraged to increase the use of Blackboard to enhance their communication and engagement with students. Examinations and assignments should be submitted via Blackboard and returned via Blackboard. Faculty and students are also encouraged to use chat rooms. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning offers courses in effective use of Blackboard.

CLASS EQUIPMENT & FURNITURE

To enhance the safety in the classrooms, labs and computer labs, these rooms will be equipped with disinfecting wipes. Students and faculty will be required to clean and disinfect furniture and equipment prior to use. Computers, mannequins, and other equipment in laboratories will be cleaned and sanitized by the custodial staff between classes, but students and staff should be mindful of sanitizing computer and lab equipment when multiple individuals are using them during a class. Protocol for doing so will be placed in all classrooms.

4. Campus Housing

OCCUPANCY

The residence halls will be available for students during the Fall 2020 semester at a reduced capacity. Given the size of each room, and in adherence to physical distancing requirements, only single room occupancy will be permitted. Students will be charged at the double occupancy rate.

The move-in processes will be staggered to minimize large groups waiting to check-in, and the same process will occur during check-out at the end of the semester. Social distancing protocols will be followed during the move-in and move-out processes.

The Residence Hall staff are developing priority guidelines for determining which students should live on campus. Those guidelines will be reviewed and approved by the Administration and communicated to all housing applicants. Special consideration is also being given to the protocols that will be followed should there be a need to house students during a hurricane.

COMMON SPACE USAGE

Residents will be required to maintain social distancing protocols while in common areas in the residence halls, including lobbies, study halls, and outdoor courtyard areas. Use of laundry facilities will be managed by an appointment system only. The custodial staff will conduct regular and rigorous sanitization of all common spaces and bathrooms.

DINING FACILITIES

Dine-in options will be available on a limited capacity during the Fall 2020 semester. On-campus dining services will utilize disposable and single use options. The serving line area will be marked to adhere to physical distance guidelines. Food will also be available for take-out. Extended hours of operation will facilitate ability to meet customer needs and physical distancing guidelines. Catering services will be limited and only available on a 'grab and go' basis.

VISITOR POLICY

Based on the guidance on physical distancing, no visitors will be allowed in the residence halls during the Fall 2020 semester.

5. Facilities & Events

ACTIVITIES/EVENTS/GROUNDS

Plans are being developed for the use of facilities and grounds for activities and events in adherence to guidance and recommendations from CDC, VIDO, and local government as it relates to large group gatherings and settings. Modifications to facility layouts will adhere to social distancing protocols of 6ft, thus significantly reducing the capacity of the assembly areas. Regular cleaning and sanitization are required by both the University custodial department as well as the user group. Food services provided during the activity/event will be allowed as a ‘Grab & Go’ distribution only. Buffet-style service will not be permitted at any campus facility during this period.

On-campus events will remain suspended through July, except for critical activities/events needed and approved by Administration. Activities and events in the Fall 2020 semester will need to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Resumption of activities will be gradual and phased based on local public health conditions as well as institutional capacity. The administration of intercollegiate athletics activities, including participation in competitive sports, will be determined in consultation with the governing body of our athletics programs, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and consistent with public health guidelines and requirements.

OTHER CAPACITY ASSESSMENT NEEDS

Capacity assessment for use of outdoor common areas, lobbies, game rooms, fitness rooms, and large group gatherings, including December 2020 commencement activities, are still under consideration. Assessments will be completed in adherence to large group guidelines and health safety protocols.

6. Taking Care of Everyone

HEALTH SERVICES

The Campus Health Services Departments will continue to provide all health services to the University Community via Tele-Health options. Consultations will be conducted via telephone and/or video calls. Walk-ins will not be allowed. In-person appointments will require the use of personal protective equipment, particularly masks or face coverings. The department will continue to monitor and follow guidance from the CDC, VIDOH and the American College Health Association.

The VIDOH has identified quarantine facilities on island and will provide UVI assistance with isolating off-campus any symptomatic individuals as may be required.

COVID-19 TESTING, VACCINES AND TEMPERATURE SCREENING

The Territory is currently capable of testing only symptomatic individuals. Mass testing of asymptomatic individuals or antibody testing are currently not available. According to the CDC, a vaccine is not anticipated to be available prior to January 2021.

In preparation for the Fall semester, testing for COVID-19 will be mandatory for all employees and students before returning to campus. The Administration is finalizing the protocols in this regard and it will be circulated once finalized. The University has explored the option of having all students and employees tested through a local private source. The cost for the testing is included as part of the employee health insurance coverage and co-pay requirements. More exploration must be done to determine how to cover the cost for those students and other employees who do not have health insurance. An update will be provided, and a decision made before the Fall semester begins. For out of Territory students, the University will also explore ways they can be tested prior to arrival in the Territory.

The University is also exploring antibody testing and the development and implementation of a temperature screening process that would be used when individuals are entering very sensitive areas or events.

ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

The Campus Health Services Departments will monitor additional concerns including COVID-19 late bloomers, risks of coronavirus with the influenza, and the impact of hurricane activities during the pandemic. Periodic information notices will be distributed to the University Community to maintain vigilance and preparation.

While the University is working to prioritize the health and safety of students, faculty, staff, and visitors who return to campus, the uncertainty around COVID-19 and the potential for increased risk or related lawsuits is a concern going into the Fall semester. As a result, the University is exploring with legal counsel the appropriate liability protection for the institution.

7. Stay Informed!

The University needs the assistance of all students and employees to ensure that everyone remains informed! Everyone has a responsibility to read all updates and notices about COVID-19.

The Campus Emergency Coordinators and Public Relations will monitor changes in the cases of community spread in the Territory. Signage and notices regarding COVID-19 safety and social distancing requirements will be placed in classrooms, offices, common rooms and bulletin boards across the campuses.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: COVID-19 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The Public Relations Department will provide regular updates via press releases on the COVID-19 UVI website page, through the UVI Messaging, BucsAlert, FaceBook, Twitter, etc. A special press release will be developed and distributed upon the approval of these recommendations and throughout the summer.