

## Postsecondary Education Under COVID-19

Reopening college campuses to the students and faculty – ensuring their health and safety – will challenge college administrators across the state. Institutions are faced with a multidimensional challenge, attempting to stem the transmission of infectious diseases among a population of young adults, whose daily interactions on a college campus can span several buildings and hundreds of people.

College presidents -- facing the uncertainty -- agree the path forward under COVID-19 is to reopen campuses; although their approaches are vastly different. More two-year colleges are opting for online education, while four-year universities are choosing to bring students back onto campus for face-to-face instruction. Most administrators are balancing the needs of its diverse stakeholder community: students, parents, faculty, staff and local host communities. Consumer-conscious students and parents expect face-to-face instruction, and if not possible, expect a discount for online instruction. Faculty and staff express concern for their wellbeing in delivering educational service and support services in an environment susceptible to coronavirus. Local communities, particularly whose economy is reliant on the students on campus, are eager to a return to normalcy.

### Managing Risk on Open Campus

College campuses are open systems, unlike a manufacturing facility as an example. A manufacturing facility can more easily control human interactions because they operate closed secure systems, typically with limited points of access and egress. Closed-system operations can also manage employee movements within facilities with training, use of operating procedures and employee accountability measures, all of which are normal for the manufacturing industry.

On the other hand, college campuses are open, physically, with a myriad of buildings, each with multiple points of access and egress. These buildings have multiple purposes -- instructional, or recreational, or libraries/study centers, or food areas, or student support/financial aid offices – inviting students to enter one or more times daily. Add to this campus complexity the majority of faculty, staff and students live off campus, where a college has little to no influence on its constituents' behaviors or interactions outside of campus.

College football offers a cautionary tale. In June 2020, the NCAA allowed voluntary workouts for student athletes. Within a month, a number of programs announced athletes tested positive for COVID-19: Clemson University postponed practices after 28 athletes tested positive, the University of Texas had 13 athletes who tested positive, Louisiana State University learned that at least 30 athletes tested positive. The occurrences of positive tests illustrate the difficulty colleges face in reopening their campuses. The LSU student athletes, according to published reports, contracted COVID-19 after a night to a local bar, and returned to practice the following day, exposing other student athletes to coronavirus. Since these initial reports, NMSU has reported positive tests for coronavirus in its football program. Other universities have announced suspension of athletic programs for the fall semester; no programs in New Mexico have made similar announcements.

**AGENCY:** Colleges and Universities in New Mexico

**DATE:** July 16, 2020

**PURPOSE OF HEARING:**  
Discuss the Reopening Strategies.

**WITNESS:** Garnett Stokes, President, University of New Mexico; Dan Arvizu, Chancellor, New Mexico State University; Becky Rowley, President, Santa Fe Community College

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**EXPECTED OUTCOME:**  
Discussion of the reopening plans and complexity for college campuses, which are open systems.

## Measures to Protect Students

**Instruction and Educational Content Delivery.** Each of the 24 public colleges and universities in New Mexico have developed reopening plans and have defined the manner by which the campuses will open. For the fall semester, all of the institutions will provide the option to offer instruction online, ensuring education is available to students. Career technical education classes and labs will be offered in person with strict adherence to the CDC guidelines on social distancing and personal protective equipment.

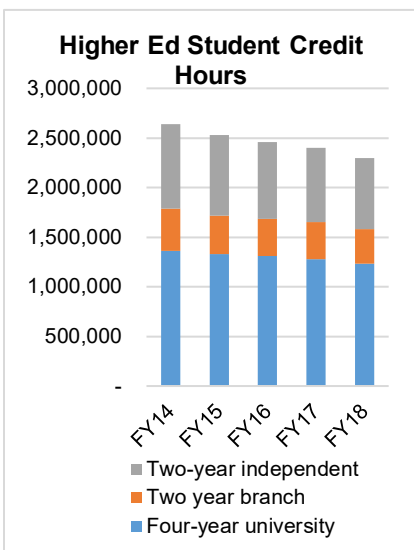
A few of the two-year colleges – San Juan College and New Mexico Junior College – and most of the four-year universities will offer hybrid instructional models with live online, in-person classes and labs. These institutions are seeking to manage the risk while allowing for student and faculty flexibility to participate. NMJC as an example will use its large classroom spaces or performance halls to offer lecture-style classes, creating more space to physically separate students who choose to attend in person. At the same time, students who wish to view online will be able to participate live through an online portal.

**Playing Offense or Defense.** Institutional reopening plans, while in alignment with CDC guidelines and with the Governor’s public health orders, demonstrate varying levels of specificity on implementation. Some plans are detailed, offering faculty and staff heuristics on how to handle situations that may occur under the new normal of COVID-19. NMSU requires its faculty and staff to complete training modules. Other reopening plans are less thoughtful, simply relying on CDC guidelines in the case of an occurrence(s) of coronavirus on campus. Very few plans discuss explicitly the actions an institution will take in this case, or define minimum thresholds or responses. A good example, NMSU reports it will use contact tracing when a case is discovered, offering quarantine areas for students, faculty or staff impacted, while closing the directly affected facility for 48 hours until the area has been disinfected. Several institutions report in their plans partnerships with local hospital, medical staff and ancillary services to support its actions when a case is discovered. However, the consistency in planning among institutions is not evident, despite the Governor’s public health order requiring defined protocols and implementation plans.

It appears that the contingency plans for most institutions will be to revert to online instruction, if an outbreak occurs. It is unclear if the institutions have considered the implications of that decision or what levels of an outbreak would trigger the decision.

## Sharing Resources or Rightsizing Institutions

Workload (as measured by completed courses) and student enrollment have declined by 15 percent at public colleges and universities throughout the state over the past five years. Despite the declines, institutions have been increasing programs. The most recent Higher Education Advisory Committee meeting approved 11 new academic programs at six institutions. One example, a new natural gas compression technology certificate program was approved for NMSU-Carlsbad, at a time when San Juan College has had difficulty attracting more than eight students for a similar program. Mesalands Community College offers a technical writing certificate, when minimum requirements for a job in the field are a bachelor’s degree.



Leadership at institutions must adjust or right size its academic programming to meet financial constraints. Sharing resources among institutions will become more important if institutions seek to remain competitive and survive. The action may require faculty reductions.

Faculty have not faced furlough or layoff measures at this point. If workload and student enrollment continue to decline, institutions will be required to address the financial impacts with traditional reduction-in-force strategies or reduction of academic programs or more creative approaches of sharing resources.

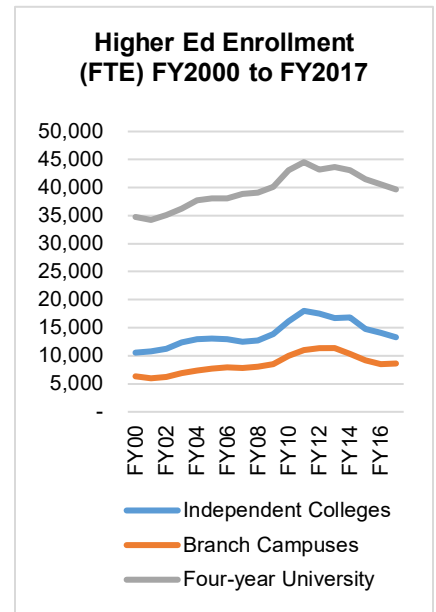
Most college presidents are reluctant to project workload under COVID-19, but acknowledge the impacts of closed campuses with facilities that are not operating. Some institutions have begun to furlough staff, whose role is based on providing day-to-day support for faculty and students. Staff reductions have affected auxiliary business units of an institutions, such as housing, food service, or recreational centers.

### College Enrollment

Higher education institutions understand that their business models, while in this new world of COVID-19, depend heavily on the effectiveness of their reopening plans. Without student enrollment, several institutions would be unable to survive. Declining enrollment, 14 percent decline over the past 5 years, has been a problem for New Mexico’s public colleges and universities pre-COVID-19.

In April 2020, several national organizations predicted enrollment loses of 20 percent in the higher education sector because of the impacts of COVID-19. At the same time, several New Mexico institutions were predicting similar declines in enrollment. Santa Fe Community College reported that it is projecting a 30 percent decline, UNM is basing its budget on a 6 percent enrollment decline. Moody’s Investors Service in June released its projections that enrollments would increase from 2 to 5 percent, citing student preferences to stay closer to home. Moody’s noted several states’ – Texas, California, and New Jersey – may actually benefit, citing data showing public colleges with high percentages of in-state students could increase enrollments. In New Mexico, UNM’s student body is comprised of 82 percent resident students. NMSU reports 70 percent of its student body are resident students, although a large number of students from El Paso, Texas attend NMSU.

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s annual report, *The Condition of Education 2018*, college enrollments increased nationally by 28 percent for undergraduate students and 38 percent for graduate students from 2000 to 2016. More New Mexicans are seeking a postsecondary education today compared with FY2000, growing by 19 percent, or 9,818 more students.



Growth Rates in College Enrollment (FTE)						
	FY 2000 to 2011		FY 2011 to 2017		FY 2000 to 2017	
	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change	Number
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>42.4%</b>	<b>21,910</b>	<b>-16.4%</b>	<b>(12,092)</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>9,818</b>
Four-year University	27.9%	9,722	-11.0%	(4,903)	13.8%	4,819
Two-year Branch	75.3%	4,736	-22.2%	(2,446)	36.4%	2,290
Two-year Independent	70.6%	7,452	-26.3%	(4,743)	25.7%	2,709

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## COVID-19 Impact on College Sports

More than 2,200 student athletes compete in college sports at two-year colleges and four-year universities in New Mexico. The state appropriates more than \$16 million to support these programs, funding which constitutes the majority of the budgets for all but the Division 1 programs at NMSU and UNM. The Division 1 programs rely less on state appropriations than on self-generated revenues, such as ticket sales, media contracts and donor support.

The governing bodies for competitive collegiate sports, the NCAA and NJCAA mainly, have left the decision for fall competition to the conferences for each sport. Nationally, the focus for reopening sports has been on football – a strong revenue source for most competitive programs. It appears football programs are preparing to play a fall schedule. Unclear at this point is how that direction will develop practically and logistically. Will games be open to the public and how will institutions protect players and fans? How are athletic departments preparing for the financial impacts? Currently, New Mexico's Division 1 programs have already incurred deficits with their parent institution.

### Financial Impact to UNM and NMSU Athletics

As colleges reopen, NMSU and UNM athletic departments face significant revenue reductions. Both programs believe their self-generated revenues could be reduced by 50 percent, or \$9 million at NMSU and \$12 million at UNM.

Recently, several football conferences have made announcements about plans for fall football season: the IVY leagues schools have postponed fall sports, several Division 1 conferences have restricted their schedules to conference-only games, other conferences will make announcements this week or are considering postponing for a semester. UNM and NMSU are being impacted by these decisions: both schools rely on revenue from “guarantee games”, where UNM or NMSU football teams play highly competitive programs from the Power Five Conferences. As an example, UNM was slated to play the University of Southern California football team and NMSU to play UCLA. These games would generate more than \$2.5 million for the New Mexico programs.

Ticket sales are an important source of revenue for the programs, generating \$1.4 million for NMSU and \$5 million for UNM. Generally, the basketball programs provide higher level of revenue than football. The UNM football program has generated \$1 million in ticket sales, with very low attendance. The change in leadership within the program however had promised an opportunity to reinvigorate the fan base.

Football programs, while expensive, are important to athletic programs for other important revenue opportunities, such as conference revenue sharing agreements, donor contributions, and media contracts. In many cases, these agreements require athletic departments to field a football team, or lose eligibility to participate in the conference. UNM, for example, receives \$4 million for its media rights contract; according to the athletic department, UNM expects the media rights contract revenue to decline by up to 50 percent.

Overall, both NMSU and UNM athletic departments may face challenging budget years. To maintain Division 1 status in the NCAA, a university must host at least 16 sports team, which is the number NMSU hosts. UNM hosts 18 teams. Other expenditure items are contractual obligation, such as coaching contracts. While

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marginal savings will be found in reduced travel and operating costs, the athletic programs will face the dilemma of maintaining a competitive program while incurring at least one season of reduced revenue.