



SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Reopening during a COVID-19 Pandemic Critical Questions for Institutions of Higher Education

This time six months ago, higher education institutions were returning from the usual winter break and preparing for the start of the Spring 2020 semester, including commencements and summer programming. No one then could have anticipated the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak and the onset of a global pandemic. The 2020 public health crisis halted all normal routines and operations and resulted in a major pivot for everyday life. Higher education has not been immune to the pandemic's impact. Colleges and university administrators, like other leaders, want to get back to normal as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, business as usual seems like a distant thought and reopening colleges and universities will require major adjustments in the intricate and complex operations of institutions of higher learning.

In an effort to provide key information to facilitate a successful reconvening of on-campus operations in South Carolina, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) convened a group of institutional representatives, the South Carolina Higher Education Recovery Advisory Group (HERAG), to assess existing and emerging resources, along with the real time planning efforts of institutions of higher education (IHEs) in the Palmetto State.

South Carolina's postsecondary education system, like that of many other states, represents a myriad of colleges and universities across sectors that serve diverse local and student communities. With such a variety of constituents and needs, it can be challenging to ensure information is applicable for all stakeholders, locations, and circumstances. Rural campuses face different logistic challenges from their urban counterparts. Large institutions may have a wider range of resources available to combat the virus but also have larger populations at risk. This guide highlights reopening recommendations from trusted education and health related organizations, both nationally and globally. The HERAG analyzed and thematically compiled a cross-section of resources to create a framework based on several critical planning questions for IHE consideration.

The guide, while neither comprehensive nor prescriptive, offers a checklist of activities and considerations identified as important for a safe, thoughtful, and effective reopening of college campuses. These considerations and questions focus on various complex, but essential academic,

financial, ethical, and operational areas innate to the basic functioning of higher education institutions that can assist institutional leaders in planning. OpenSmartEDU's *COVID-19 Planning Guide and Self-Assessment for Higher Education*, published by Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security and other higher education stakeholders, was a primary reference because it represents a consensus view on many topics and presents information in extensive yet accessible detail.

We understand that institutional size, geographic location, and the local status of the pandemic will inform and shape each institution's response and plan. This document offers no official recommendations or industry standards but serves as an accessible resource that prompts robust discussions about how to safely reopen higher education campuses during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will update the document as more information becomes available.

QUESTION 1: Does your institution have sufficient health & safety materials and protocols to address the unique challenges of COVID-19?	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted an approach to monitoring COVID-19 Alert Levels (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020b, 2020d; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 19-22) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Metrics to assess overall disease activity (South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control [SC DHEC], 2020b) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two-week cumulative incidence rate ▪ Trend in incidence rate ▪ Two-week percent positive rate • Implemented health safety measures related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Academic Calendar (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 53) ○ Instruction (ACHA, 2020, p. 5; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 53) ○ Instructional Spaces (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 56) ○ Research (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 58) ○ Library (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 59) • Implemented health safety measures and policies (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 36-41) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ PPE and distancing (ACHA, 2020, p. 5; CDC, 2020a; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 36) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Facilities (ACHA, 2020, p. 4; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 39) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Posters and signage (CDC, 2020a; SC DHEC, 2020c) ○ Student Life (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 68-73) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Orientation (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 68) ▪ Housing (ACHA, 2020, p. 9-10; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 69) ▪ Food Services (ACHA, 2020, p. 10-11; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 72) ○ Athletics (ACHA, 2020, p. 11-14;) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilities (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 74, 94) ▪ Activities (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 75-76, 94) ▪ Recreational Programs and Club/Intramural Sports (ACHA, 2020, p. 14-15) • Reviewed issues related to logistics and supply chain (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 82) • Availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) • Testing capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Determined the institution's approach to SARS-CoV-2 Testing (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2020, p. 2-3, 5-6; CDC, 2020e; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 28; SC DHEC, 2020a, p. 1) • Contact tracing capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Determined the institution's approach to Contact Tracing (ACHA, 2020, p. 2-3, 5-6; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 32; SC DHEC, 2020, p. 2) • Space for physical distancing and quarantining <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Determined Quarantine & Isolation Policies (ACHA, 2020, p. 2-3; CDC, 2020b; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 34; SC DHEC, 2020a, p. 1-2) • Cleaning & Disinfection (ACHA, 2020, p. 7-8; CDC, 2020b; SC DHEC, 2020a, p. 3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guidance – Plan, Prepare, and Respond (CDC, 2020c) ○ Registered Antimicrobial Products for COVID-19 (United States Environmental Protection Agency [US EPA], 2020) • Access to external health facilities as needed 	

QUESTION 1: Does your institution have sufficient health & safety materials and protocols to address the unique challenges of COVID-19? (CONTINUED)	✓
• Staffing (ACHA, 2020, p. 3-4; CDC, 2020b)	
○ Established measures for the protection of faculty (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 61)	
○ Established measures for the protection of staff (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 49-51)	
• Communication capacity with students and staff (CDC, 2020b)	
○ Signage resources and multi-media toolkits (CDC, 2020a; SC DHEC, 2020c)	
• Emergency plan in case of abrupt closure	
○ Developed emergency planning protocols (CDC, 2020d; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 33)	
• Legal and liability considerations (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 47-52)	
○ Waivers and compliance (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 47)	
○ Contracts and insurance (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 47)	
○ Human resources (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 49)	
○ OSHA (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 50)	
○ Labor relations (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 51)	

QUESTION 2: What controls will prevent and/or mitigate negative financial impacts on the institution that are unique to the pandemic?	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calculated the financial impact of unforeseen COVID-19 circumstances of Spring and Summer 2020 to date (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 45) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecasted the potential financial impact for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 in various COVID-19 operating scenarios and has determined that reopening in 2020-2021 is financially viable under all scenarios (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 45) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted comprehensive financial planning to ensure sufficient funding for new materials, protocols, financing for faculty and staff 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessed Legal & Regulatory Risk (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 47] 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The institution has reviewed contracts and insurance policies (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 47) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained financial capacity for at least the academic year (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 45) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Completed financial planning including modeling the impact of changes in enrollment (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 63) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anticipating a wide range of added expenses including: 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information Technology (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 80) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Campus Infrastructure (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 82) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supply Chain issues (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 84) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PPE, physical distancing, engineering controls, and testing, screening, and supplies (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 45) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserves for emergencies (e.g., an outbreak; emergency financial support for students) (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 45) 	

QUESTION 3: Has your institution developed a quality academic program for the year (whether fully on-campus, online, or hybrid)?	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of faculty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reviewed critical planning elements with Faculty Governance (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 61) ○ Mutual aid faculty agreements with institutions in close proximity 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determined if and how to adjust the Academic Calendar to accommodate health and safety protocols (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 53) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established all COVID-19 operating scenarios for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In-Person and Online Instructional methods (ACHA, 2020, p. 4-5; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 53) ○ Grading and Assessments methods (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 55) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offerings that enable students to meet degree requirements and make academic progress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developed strategies to mitigate academic inequity and accommodate students with special permissions and needs (ACHA, 2020, p. 5; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 53) ○ Evaluated its use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructional Spaces (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 56) ▪ Specialized Spaces (Labs, Studios, Performance, Religious Spaces) (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 57) ▪ Library Services (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 59) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty development (especially for remote learning) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provided Faculty Training (and resources for students and faculty) to enhance quality of instruction (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 61) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate counseling and advising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reviewed and revised as needed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic Advising (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 65) ▪ Academic Support services (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 65) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Travel & Study Abroad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Current Guidelines (ACHA, 2020, p. 17; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 83-84) ○ International students, faculty (including visiting faculty), and staff who are incoming to or present on campus (ACHA, 2020, p. 18; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 67) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least some extracurricular and social activities to engage students • Adequate electronic infrastructure for faculty, staff and students • Means to judge the quality of institutional academic performance 	

QUESTION 4: Has your institution developed the requisite management and oversight capabilities necessary to manage through the pandemic?	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management structure that provides for oversight of all major institutional functions and functions now required by the pandemic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Established and communicated a vision for the planning process and for managing within a COVID-19 environment (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 23) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed and trained executives with appropriate authority and responsibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developed and communicated a clear Planning Process for internal workgroups, including the goals, expectations, and authority of workgroups (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both leadership and workgroups consider equity and inclusion of key stakeholders in the institution ▪ Clear and efficient strategy for coordinating across workgroups which is inclusive of leadership, functional and cross-functional workgroups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including frequent meetings between workgroups, clearly defined responsibilities, and channels for internal and external communication during the planning process. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership defines expectations for timing, output, and key stakeholder involvement for both interim and final decisions (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A diverse group of students, faculty, and staff are involved in critical phases of the planning process ○ Established a multisectoral decision making body or Emergency Operations Center to manage institution wide health concerns and/or COVID-19 outbreaks within the community 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient management communication (ACHA, 2020, p. 15-17; CDC, 2020b; OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developed points of contact with local public health officials and local healthcare centers in order to communicate, coordinate, and execute plans for risk mitigation and community outbreak ○ Collaboration with institutions in close proximity on a shared communication plan and communicate possible COVID-19 exposure in alignment with the emergency operations plan ○ Leadership, operations center and planning groups actively monitor and survey local, regional, national, and international media sources for accurate, up to date COVID-19 information ○ Communications team is coordinated such that messages are timely, mission aligned, and not in conflict with other communications (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 42) ○ Major announcements are archived and/or in a publicly available channel for all stakeholders of the institution to easily access (OpenSmartEDU, 2020, p. 42) 	

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the individuals that supported this effort with guidance, consultation, and resources. This guide was created using the collective input of South Carolina higher education institutional leadership.

South Carolina Higher Education Recovery Advisory Group (HERAG)

- James E. Clark, President, South Carolina State University
- David A. DeCenzo, Ph.D., President, Coastal Carolina University
- Tim Hardee, System President, South Carolina Technical College System
- Sandra J. Jordan, Ph.D., Chancellor, University of South Carolina Aiken
- Forest E. Mahan, Ph.D., President, Aiken Technical College
- Krista L. Newkirk, J.D., President, Converse College
- L. Jeffrey Perez, Ph.D., President and CEO, South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, Inc.
- Lisa K. Saladin, Ph.D., Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Medical University of South Carolina

South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

- Rusty L. Monhollon, Ph.D., President and Executive Director
- Regine R. Rucker, Ph.D., Program Manager
- Shakara Smith, Executive Assistant for the President and Executive Director

REFERENCES:

1. American College Health Association. (2020, May 7). *Considerations for reopening institutions of higher education in the COVID-19 era*. https://www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Considerations_for_Reopening_IHEs_in_the_COVID-19_Era_May2020.pdf
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020a, April 30). *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Communication resources*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020b, May 18). *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Interim guidance for administrators of US institutions of higher education*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-ihe-response.html>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020c, May 21). *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Cleaning and disinfecting*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020d, May 30). *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Considerations for institutions of higher education*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html>
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020e, June 30). *Interim Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education Administrators for SARS-CoV-2 Testing*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/ihe-testing.html>
7. OpenSmartEDU. (2020, June 12). *COVID-19 planning guide and self-assessment for higher education*. <https://www.opensmartedu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Covid-19-Planning-Guide-for-Higher-Education.pdf>
8. South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. (2020a, June 19). *COVID-19 guidance for colleges/universities*. <https://www.scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/colleges-universities-covid-19>
9. South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. (2020b, June 21). *COVID-19 recent disease activity by county (as of 6.21.20) for SC Department of Education*. https://www.scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/COVID-19-Dz-Activity-Assessment-by-County-for-Dept-of-Ed_6.22.20.pdf
10. South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. (2020c). *Educational and outreach materials (COVID-19)*. <https://www.scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/educational-outreach-materials-2019-ncov>
11. United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2020, March 3). *List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)*. <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>