

Resource Guide for Institutions of Higher Education on Website Presentation of COVID-19 Information

In order to supplement the efforts of institutions of higher education in responding to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education is offering recommendations on best practices for COVID-19 informational websites. While circumstances may differ from one institution to another, all institutions need to provide factual, up-to-date information to their respective campus communities regarding COVID-19 response. These practices can aid institutions in better organizing the information communicated to their key constituencies.

A centralized COVID-19 website or webpage is successful when serving as a regularly updated “one-stop” information center for current and prospective students, faculty, staff, and families. It is especially effective to address frequently asked questions, as well as to tailor specific information and resources to different stakeholders. The information below delineates some best practices for COVID-19 websites, as demonstrated by various colleges and universities across the state.

General Best Practices

It is recommended that COVID-19 websites/webpages be well-organized and detailed, providing frequent updates and covering potential questions and issues. The layout of these sites should indicate exactly where desired information can be located.

- Ensuring the COVID-19 page is easily accessible from the institution’s home/main webpage
 - Displaying the portal/link to the COVID-19 page as a banner, tab, or pop-up window on the main website
 - Posting the link on any institution-run social media sites/pages
- Indicating, on the main COVID-19 page, when the site was last updated (include date)
- Providing separate tabs/FAQ pages for faculty, staff, and student information
 - Categorizing content by subject (housing, technology, travel, health and event information, etc.)
- Providing a visible link to all university/college COVID-19 communications
 - Situational updates to the campus community should be provided on a regular basis
- Listing common COVID-19 FAQs regarding the impact on college operations, health and safety, online courses, traveling, etc.

Essential Information for Main COVID-19 Page

An institution's COVID-19 page should include essential information to help students, faculty, and staff understand the institutional response. This information could include key contacts, hygienic practices, and campus operating status updates.

- Indication of the main point(s) of contact, as well as their contact information, to whom all questions from current students (graduate, undergraduate, study abroad), incoming/prospective students, parents, faculty, and staff can be directed
- Links to important campus-wide resources (Health Services, Human Resources, etc.) and state/nationwide resources (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], New Jersey Department of Health [DOH], Office of the Secretary of Higher Education [OSHE], etc.)
 - Recommending all institutions link OSHE and DOH guidance on their sites
 - OSHE: <https://nj.gov/highereducation/COVID-19.shtml>
 - DOH: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_schools.shtml
- Current campus operating status: open buildings and facilities, status on major events
- Timeline for communications on pending questions and issues
- Best COVID-19 health safety and prevention practices
 - One institution posted the [CDC hand-washing demonstration video](#) on their site
- Information to raise awareness of the facts surrounding COVID-19 and how to prevent COVID-19-related stigmas from manifesting in communities
 - See the CDC webpage with information on the potential stigma related to the coronavirus at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/related-stigma.html>
- What to do if you've been in contact with someone with COVID-19, started to exhibit symptoms, or tested positive for COVID-19

Tailored Resources for Students, Faculty, and Staff

Providing separate pages/tabs for resources/questions/contacts for students, faculty, and staff is an effective way of tailoring individual information to these constituencies. This information should include any necessary points of contact, phone numbers, emails, virtual office hours, and links to division websites.

Important Contacts/Resources for Students:

- Student Health Services
- Mental Health Services
- Academic/Advising Center
- Study Abroad (if applicable)
- Residential Life (if applicable)
- Open facilities (e.g. Student Life/Center, Dining, etc.)
- Topics to address

- Reimbursement/refunds
- Academic policy changes
- Move-out timeline/information
- Student employment
- Commencement/graduation status

Important Content/Resources for Faculty:

- Employment policies
- State/OSHE guidance
- Status of ongoing projects/meetings/research
- Access to facilities (i.e. labs, offices)
- Online/virtual class resources
- How to answer frequently asked questions from students

Important Content/Resources for Staff:

- Employment policies
- State/OSHE guidance
- Facilities access
- Guidance on essential personnel classification

Additional Useful Content/Practices

- Tips for students, faculty, and staff on how to succeed in an online environment
 - Resources to help navigate Zoom, Canvas, or any other online programs used by institutions
- Transparency on COVID-19 associated cases on campus
- Providing updates on actions and members of the institution's Emergency Response/Management Team or COVID-19 Task Force
 - Information on how this group is monitoring and addressing the situation
 - Means for community members to contact the team with questions and concerns
- Creating a specific email for COVID-19 questions (e.g. "coronavirus@institution.edu")

Practices to Avoid

It is essential that these websites be updated and that information be easily disseminated. Therefore, avoiding the following practices will ensure website visitors find the content they are looking for.

- Providing information/updates solely via video
 - Slow internet access may make it difficult to load and watch videos, so be sure to provide textual content in addition to any video

- Leaving the site without regular updates, especially with new Executive Orders and COVID-19 situational changes (the frequency of updates may change as the situation deescalates)
- Changing the URL or location of information frequently, or providing “dead-end” hyperlinks that lead to an empty/invalid page
- Requiring site visitors to be redirected to individual department/divisional pages not connected to the main COVID-19 page
 - All information should be consolidated in a central location, and additional site links should be reserved for additional information that may not be necessary to include on a main COVID-19 website
 - This also ensures that departmental information is updated frequently
- Designing lengthy webpages that require excessive scrolling
 - If a webpage is too long, key information may be buried further down the page
 - It is more efficient to have multiple secondary pages that individuals can click on to learn more about specific topics than to place all of the information onto one page

For additional information on COVID-19 issues related to higher education, please visit the OSHE COVID-19 resource webpage, available at <https://nj.gov/highereducation/COVID-19.shtml>.