SUS Planning for a Post-COVID World: Lessons Learned, Best Practices, and Future Considerations

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Key Questions:

- Is the SUS response going to be a return to the status quo or adapting to sustained change? How do we build excellence and greater resilience for the future?

- What inherent limitations and weaknesses, and potential opportunities, has the global pandemic revealed across the SUS and how successful have we been in addressing them over the past year?

- What are the most significant "lessons learned" with relevance to higher education? What "best practices" have emerged across the SUS that we may wish to share and adopt?

- What might the post-COVID "new normal" look like for higher education in Florida, and what innovations are most likely going to gain traction and sustain in the mid- to long-term?

- How can the 12 SUS institutions collaborate most effectively in anticipation of a potential paradigm shift in higher education?

Planning Framework:

- Student Access, Progression and Learning (academic continuity),
- Academic Planning,
- Faculty Success,
- Strengthening Campus Community,
- Preventive Health, and
- Budgetary Considerations.

A Focus on Academic Planning, Faculty Success, and Research

Contributing Stakeholder Groups:

(February 19, 2021)

- Council of Academic Vice Presidents,
- Council of State University Libraries,
- Advisory Council of Faculty Senates,
- Vice Presidents of Research,
- Innovation and Online Implementation Committee, and
- Academic Coordination Group.

Challenges:

- Employee adaptation to remote work:
  - Technology, connectivity and digital literacy
  - Policies and procedures
  - Communication
  - Stress, isolation and loss of community
- Student adaptation to remote learning:
  - Technology, connectivity and digital literacy
  - Policies and procedures
  - Communication
  - Stress, isolation and loss of community
- Assessment (testing and evaluation) of student learning outcomes
- Adverse impact of COVID-19 on faculty scholarly productivity

Lessons Learned and Best Practices:

- Need for agile and evidence-based decision-making in response to continuing uncertainty and sometimes rapidly changing conditions,

- Sustained investment in online instructional platforms, digital content (libraries), and technology-rich services positioned the SUS very well to respond to COVID-19,

- Mission critical and seamless collaboration with Information Technology was essential in addition to forging new partnerships within and across universities,

- Regular communication with campus community stakeholders including the utilization of Canvas for posting course syllabi and learning modules,

- Online learning platforms (synchronous and asynchronous) will remain central to student learning (as both primary and complementary modalities),

Lessons Learned and Best Practices:

- Faculty flexibility, resourcefulness, and adoption of new modalities of instructional delivery and student learning was essential to addressing student access and student success,

- Benefits of investing in [online] coaches, tutors, and learning assistants to enhance student learning,

- Research grant applications have held steady, with awards and expenditures level or only slightly lower, and

- Telehealth has generally worked well for clinical research studies.

Recommendations:

- Establish clear expectations and policies for remote work (including faculty and staff),
- Regular audit of, and investment in, state-of-the art [instructional] technology infrastructure,
- Continue to strengthen access to digital collections, platforms and research tools,
- Consider a new taxonomy for instructional delivery and student learning,
- Design and sponsor systematic faculty and staff development programs in support of enhanced digital literacy, student engagement/new pedagogies (e.g. TOPkit), and business practices,

Recommendations:

- Support SUS-research in the effectiveness of instructional delivery and student learning across various modalities,

- Continue to develop "student toolkits" to enhance digital literacy and learning effectiveness in different instructional modalities,

- Universities should consider mitigating the potential adverse impact of diminished scholarly productivity(due to COVID-19) on faculty professional growth and development, and

- Work with SACSCOC and BOG staff to evaluate regulations, policies and procedures to enable a more nimble response, on the part of universities, to changing conditions and workforce needs.

Next steps:

- Student Access, Progression and Learning; Strengthening Campus Communities; and other Student-related issues (June 2021),

- Business and Finance (work practices, auxiliaries, investments etc); Medical Schools and Health Sciences Centers (August 2021), and

- Final report and recommendations (November 2021).

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