

Preparing for a Post-Pandemic World in the State University System: Is Additional Data Needed?

Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments, business enterprises, and educational institutions are assessing changes that they made in procedures, practices, and lessons learned. Moving forward, state university academic leaders must identify and learn from the successes and shortcomings of the past two years in the design and delivery of academic courses in order to advance enrollment, retention, and degree completion.

During 2021-22, the Board of Governors Innovation and Online Committee's Steering Committee investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning as well as the overall operation of the State University System (SUS). Administrative, faculty, staff, and student leaders provided input on a variety of key campus operations, and recommendations and action steps were offered for post-pandemic improvement throughout the SUS.

As the report was completed prior to the conclusion of the pandemic, limited performance-based data was available that would provide specificity to recommendations for post-pandemic planning, long-term operational policies and procedures, and performance metrics. The Report recommended that:

It would be prudent for the SUS to determine what additional data beyond that collected for SUS accountability reports should be collected and analyzed to provide strategic guidance on performance improvement in a post-pandemic Florida.

The Steering Committee drafted research questions to consider additional information that may be needed to identify and track critical post-pandemic changes in teaching and learning and in the operation of state university campuses. The SUS Council of Data Administrators (CODA) reviewed the research questions and provided feedback to the Committee.

Teaching and Learning

The research questions on Teaching and Learning center on the impacts of different modalities of instruction on student academic performance and success. In their review, CODA suggested that specific variables should be identified and controlled to evaluate how they may influence student performance within different delivery modalities. It will also be important to examine how delivery modalities in specific courses influence student success in subsequent courses where previous courses serve as prerequisites.

CODA also acknowledged the merits of the research topics and recommended investigative approaches that identify and control for clearly defined variables. The research topics are:

- The academic preparedness of incoming students who enroll with a significant amount of remote instruction while in high school.
- Changes in the usage and distribution within the SUS of various remote modalities.
- Changes in the mobility of students between and among SUS and Florida College System institutions during the pandemic.

University Operations

The research questions on Operations focus on the impact of remote instruction on the demands for campus physical plant space and on faculty and staff assignments and workload.

Regarding physical space on campus, it was recognized that space usage is directly influenced by faculty and staff work arrangements which vary according to academic policies both throughout the SUS and within each university. The variability of these arrangements will make it difficult to determine and project post-pandemic physical space demands.

Next Steps

Moving forward, research should focus on the impact of different delivery modalities on student success in subsequent courses and for dual-enrolled, transfer, and transient students. Key definitions for course delivery modalities, mobility, and academic preparedness should be adopted, as well as a clearly defined scope for consistency in reporting among the institutions.

- The Steering Committee should prioritize the post-pandemic research topics that have been identified and reviewed by the SUS Council of Data Administrators (CODA) and provide its prioritized list to the SUS Council of Academic Vice Presidents (CAVP) for its consideration.
- CODA should review the existing SUS Accountability Plan data requirements and metrics through a “pandemic lens” to consider if a more direct accounting is needed of the impact that academic policies established during the pandemic have had on student performance.

Through this review, gaps may be identified that now exist in SUS and institution accountability information as a result of the pandemic that may need to be addressed to inform post-pandemic planning, long-term operational policies and procedures, and performance metrics.

In a preliminary review, CODA has suggested the following relevant data points:

- SCH distribution by level, term, and modality, with comparisons for the number of courses offered versus the enrollment, as the SCH in online may be greater as the enrollment caps are higher for fully online courses than for courses that require physical space.
- Longitudinal grade distributions (by campus for Lecture and Lab courses by student type (FTIC, AA transfer, other transfer) and modality) to investigate

the effects of course modality on academic performance across the different student types.

- GPA and Test scores trends for incoming FTIC students.
- The Florida Distance Learning Research Repository was created to collect, organize, curate, and communicate the important research in online learning happening throughout the SUS. Members of the Repository should review the report: *Preparing for a Post-Pandemic World in the SUS* and propose research projects to advance the findings, recommendations, and proposed action steps in the report.
- The Board of Governors Office of Data & Analytics is reporting that the System-wide online participation rate of undergraduate students in academic year 2021-22 is higher than pre-pandemic system rate. This elevated rate is primarily caused by the summer (2021) term rate being well-above the historic pre-pandemic summer rates. The preliminary fall 2022 System rate appears to be slightly higher than fall 2021 data. Participation rate data for the different modes of academic course delivery should continue to be tracked.