

Columbia University

In The City of New York

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

August 20, 2020

The Honorable Daniel O'Donnell
New York State Assembly
245 West 104th Street
New York, NY 10025

The Honorable Inez Dickens
New York State Assembly
163 West 125th Street, Suite 911
New York, NY 10027

The Honorable Al Taylor
New York State Assembly
2541-55 Adam Clayton
Powell Jr. Blvd.
New York, NY 10039

Brian Benjamin
New York State Senate
163 West 125th Street
Harlem State Office Bldg., Suite 912
New York, NY 10027

The Honorable Robert Jackson
New York State Senate
5030 Broadway, Suite 701
New York, NY 10034

The Honorable Mark Levine
New York City Council
500 West 141st Street
New York, NY 10031

Dear Assembly Members O'Donnell, Dickens, and Taylor; Senators Benjamin and Jackson; and Council Member Levine:

Thank you for your letter dated August 7, 2020 regarding the University's reopening plans for the Fall term. On behalf of the University, we appreciate your continued partnership as we work together to ensure the health and safety of our community and neighbors.

As you know, the August 14 announcement from President Bollinger indicated a shift in reopening plans, moving all undergraduate classes to a virtual format. The University remains confident that our plans maintain the highest standards for public safety for those faculty, staff and students who will be on campus. However, one of the factors contributing to the change President Bollinger announced was Governor Cuomo's quarantine policy, which made it very complicated to bring back undergraduate students from those states that he has mandated have a 14-day quarantine. We wanted our undergraduate students to have a positive and memorable entry to the campus, but it was clear that the quarantine significantly restricted the living and learning environment for our students, compromising their early educational experience. Senior administrators and Columbia's leading experts in public health will continue to monitor infection trends and safety guidelines as we move into Fall Term and begin to think about the Spring. All faculty, staff, and the limited number of students who will be on campus are expected to comply

with mandatory trainings, testing, and ongoing public health guidelines as outlined online on the [University's COVID-19 Resource Guide](#) and presented to the uptown community boards on August 5th.

Although the plans for on-campus education and residential life have changed, we are committed to providing you with answers to the questions put forward in your August 7th letter. Please see below for responses to these questions.

As always, please feel free to reach out to me or my staff should you have any additional questions. We look forward to continuing to work together to ensure the health and well-being of our entire community.

Sincerely,



Shailagh J. Murray
Executive Vice President for Public Affairs
Columbia University in the City of New York

CC: Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Barry Weinberg, Manhattan Community Board 9 Chair

Questions Submitted on August 7, 2020:

Modeling

- 1) How many total individuals do you expect to return to campus for the Fall Semester, including undergraduate, graduate, and staff? How many Columbia affiliated individuals do you expect will be moving into the local community in off campus housing?

Given the change in plans for the Fall Term announced on August 14, we do not have this information at this time.

- 2) Do you have data on how many individuals will be moving or returning to our neighborhood from States currently on the New York State Travel Advisory lists and countries with similarly high COVID-19 rates?

Given the change in plans for the Fall Term announced on August 14, we do not have this information at this time.

- 3) Was the greater density of our community compared with other urban university campuses (e.g. MIT, University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins) considered in your models?

The University is closely monitoring national infection trends and other data, and continues to communicate with peer institutions in New York City, New York State, and in other urban areas across the country. All operating plans for the Fall Term take into consideration the most updated information on infection rates, as well as compliance with city, state, and federal guidelines. The unique circumstance of Columbia's location in New York City, and in the Morningside Heights, Harlem, and Washington Heights communities, has been a key factor in our decision-making from the very beginning.

- 4) How many cases of COVID-19 do your models predict will be present in the Columbia Community over the course of the semester? What is the projected number of additional cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in the surrounding community and region due to Columbia reopening?

Significant numbers of essential and now non-essential personnel, along with some students, have been safely coming to campus since the spring, as allowed by the various phases of the NY Forward plan. Since June 18 when we began our own testing program, no one who received a PCR has tested positive.

Models predict ranges of cases based on a number of inputs, including the Rt in NYC and on campus, adherence with non-pharmaceutical interventions, and availability of testing. Given the measures in place, we do not anticipate a negative impact to the community.

As of August 18, the [University's COVID-19 Resource Guide](#) website publicly lists data on testing and testing results on a weekly basis.

On Campus Procedures

- 5) What consideration has been given to the incubation period between an infection that could have occurred while a student was in transit to campus (e.g. landing at an airport) and when it would appear in a test, such as the gateway test you plan to administer to all affiliates upon arrival?

Although the number of students on campus will be considerably fewer than previously anticipated (limited to those students who cannot pursue their academic programs successfully without being present on campus), the University will remain in full compliance with all NYS and NYC requirements, including those which mandate a 14-day quarantine for individuals arriving from states designated in NY's Travel Advisory.

- 6) How will you monitor and enforce the 14-day quarantine upon arrival? For anyone quarantining before arrival to campus, how will you enforce and guarantee these students sufficiently isolated?

Columbia requires students to adhere to all NYS requirements, including registration through the State's Travel Advisory webpage. The University is providing support for students during their quarantine, including access to resources, psychological support, and activities, to support the quarantine.

For more information on student quarantine, please visit <https://covid19.columbia.edu/content/coronavirus-quarantine-guide-students>.

- 7) Will there be temperature check stations set up at entry points of the campus?

We are not planning to implement temperature checks at access points. All students, faculty and staff are required to complete a daily symptom self-check, to be done every day before entering campus premises. Additionally, all students, faculty and staff are required to take an initial COVID-19 test prior to returning to campus, and frequently repeated tests will be performed.

- 8) How frequently will classrooms and buildings be sanitized?

In addition to enhanced cleaning, the Office of Facilities and Operations has implemented several changes to improve health and safety on campus, including:

- *Converting restroom fixtures to operate automatically.*
- *Starting with research-focused buildings, new touchless faucets and flushometers are being installed where possible to improve restroom hygiene. Installing hand sanitizer stations in campus buildings.*
- *Sanitizing dispensers are located in main entrance lobbies, and the number of stations will be increased for all campus buildings.*
- *Increasing steam cleaning of restrooms. Steam cleaning of restrooms disinfects without chemicals, using heat from steam to disinfect and kill germs.*
- *Improved air flow through new air filters and other modifications to our HVAC system installed throughout the campus.*

The frequency of this process is increasing compared to monthly pre-COVID-19. This process is an enhancement to CDC and New York State Department of Health guidelines. For more information, please visit <https://covid19.columbia.edu/content/covid-19-training-safe-practices-columbia>

- 9) If multiple students test positive in a class or building (i.e. more than an isolated case), what measures will be undertaken to ensure no further spread of the disease occurs to faculty, students, staff, and the surrounding community?

As mentioned previously, we are publicly reporting all positive tests via our website. In addition, if the R_t on campus is greater than 1.0 and/or higher than the R_t in NYC by 50%, the University will modify campus density and further restrict students to campus as well as reinforce face covering and physical distancing requirements. Testing frequency and approach may also be modified. With the University's contact tracing program, this situation would be recognized rapidly and these measures implemented to ensure that further spread does not occur.

- 10) Where will student, staff, and faculty quarantine take place on campus? How will delivery of food and other supplies occur?

Quarantine (upon arrival or after exposure to a known case) can usually happen in the individual's usual residence. Appropriate guidance is given to ensure this can be done safely. For undergraduate students, food is delivered. For other individuals, food delivery can be arranged and left at the front desk. For isolation (for an individual who tests positive), we move undergraduates to a separate residence on campus to provide them support during isolation. For other individuals, we work with them to evaluate if they can isolate in their regular residence, or link them with appropriate resources through Columbia Residential or NYC for alternate accommodations.

- 11) What social and mental health support will be available for students struggling with the pressures of life on campus this year?

University Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) will be available to all students for counseling care. A provider is available to speak over the phone 24/7. CPS will also be offering virtual support spaces for students in quarantine.

- 12) How will student leaders be involved to engage and encourage their peers to respect public safety guidance?

For the limited number of students still on campus, Student Ambassadors have been identified and are receiving specialized training about the Columbia Community Health Compact, COVID-19 prevention and bystander intervention methods, along with the opportunity to engage with

campus experts. They will also participate in resource development, programs and peer-to-peer support and education, and the University's upcoming "Keep Our Community Healthy" marketing campaign.

Community Safety

- 13) Will Columbia provide non-affiliate community residents with access to rapid (24-48 hr.) result testing if they live in the same building as Columbia affiliates?
- 14) Will Columbia provide access to rapid result testing for all residents in surrounding communities?

At this time, we are not able to offer testing to non-Columbia affiliates but are exploring options.

- 15) How will you contact trace non-affiliate community members to let them know they may have been exposed, if they were in a business, public space, or resident building with a Columbia affiliate who tests positive?

Columbia will partner with the NYC Test and Trace Corps to ensure that appropriate tracing of any non-Columbia affiliate occurs.

The University has developed plans to collaborate with local health departments to trace all contacts of an individual testing positive, in accordance with the protocols, training, and tools provided through the New York State Contact Tracing Program. Notification to the state health department of any positive COVID-19 test will be made directly by the testing vendors. Confidentiality will be maintained as required by federal and state law and regulations. Responsible Parties must cooperate with state and local health department contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine efforts. The University will employ its own contact tracers and will partner with local health departments.

For more information, please visit <https://covid19.columbia.edu/content/test-and-trace-program>

- 16) Will Columbia provide local businesses that students and faculty may visit with necessary PPE, Plexiglas barriers, cleaning equipment, and cleaning services?

Columbia University has remained in contact with the many businesses who are tenants in University-owned buildings to ensure that they have appropriate signage and other resources to comply with the guidance issued by New York City and State. Additionally, local businesses in Upper Manhattan also have access to resources and consultation through the Columbia-Harlem SBDC. Finally, Columbia University also announced an Emergency Loan Fund for small

businesses in Upper Manhattan to adapt their business models and make necessary changes to their establishments in order to adhere to proper social distancing and other public health measures. For more information, please visit

<https://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/sbdc/programs/columbia-loan-fund>

Columbia Community Health Compact

17) How does Columbia plan to monitor the adherence to the Community Health Compact off campus?

In the interest of supporting community health and safety, anyone who does not adhere to these commitments after being asked to do so by an appropriate authority, as set out in the Enhanced Health and Safety Policy enforcement plan, will be asked to leave Columbia's campus.

Student Ambassadors will receive specialized training about the Columbia Community Health Compact, COVID-19 prevention and bystander intervention methods, along with the opportunity to engage with campus experts. They will also participate in resource development, programs and peer-to-peer support and education, and our upcoming Keep Our Community Healthy marketing campaign. Faculty and staff are also being trained as Safety Coordinators to support these efforts and to work with their peers.

For more information, please visit <https://covid19.columbia.edu/content/enforcement-plan-enhanced-health-and-safety-policy>.

18) How does Columbia plan to enforce the Community Health Compact?

Adherence to the Compact is a requirement for being on campus.

Complaints and concerns about non-adherence can be reported in a variety of ways:

- Staff to their Supervisor.*
- Faculty to their department chair or Dean of Faculty Affairs.*
- Students to Student Affairs staff.*

Additional options for all affiliates and non-affiliates:

- Public Safety*
- University compliance hotline*
- "Report an incident" button on the websites of University Life, EOAA, and Student Conduct and Community Standards*

- 19) What are the range of tools and penalties for Columbia affiliates who fail to adhere to the Community Health Compact? For example, what will happen to a student who is willfully refusing to wear a mask? One who hosts a large group gathering? One who attends a large group gathering? Are suspension from academics and expulsion from the university included in the range of consequences? What offenses would lead to those results?

While there are no large group gatherings being planned on campus for the Fall term, and while there are significantly fewer students who will be physically on campus due to the recent decision to shift undergraduate education to remote learning, the University fully expects all students, faculty and staff to adhere to the Community Health Compact.

In the interest of supporting community health and safety, anyone who does not adhere to these commitments after being asked to do so by an appropriate authority, as set out in the Enhanced Health and Safety Policy enforcement plan, will be asked to leave Columbia's campus.

Student Ambassadors will receive specialized training about the Columbia Community Health Compact, COVID-19 prevention and bystander intervention methods, along with the opportunity to engage with campus experts. They will also participate in resource development, programs and peer-to-peer support and education, and our upcoming Keep Our Community Healthy marketing campaign. Faculty and staff are also being trained as Safety Coordinators to support these efforts and to work with their peers.

For more information, please visit <https://covid19.columbia.edu/content/enforcement-plan-enhanced-health-and-safety-policy>.

- 20) How are these stakes and specific gradations of consequences being communicated to the Columbia community?

All students, faculty and staff are required to complete a mandatory training, COVID-19 test, and conduct a daily symptom self-check before entering campus premises. All students, faculty, and staff are also required to sign the Community Health Compact before returning to campus.

- 21) How can community members report students who are breaking the Compact? Should they call campus police? 911?

All affiliates and non-affiliates can report complaints in a variety of ways, including:

- *Calling Columbia Public Safety*
- *Calling the University compliance hotline*

- Using the “Report an incident” button on the websites of University Life, EOAA, and Student Conduct and Community Standards

Additionally, all affiliates can report complaints and concerns directly to responsible parties:

- Staff to their Supervisor
- Faculty to their department chair or Dean of Faculty Affairs
- Students to Student Affairs staff

- 22) Would you consider a taskforce that includes community members and Columbia representatives to monitor local activity and provide rapid response and communication when problems arise?

Columbia University has maintained close communication with its surrounding community boards, elected officials, tenants’ associations, and other community-based leaders, both prior to and during the pandemic. The University will continue to engage with these and additional stakeholders on ways to encourage appropriate behavior for the wellbeing of all community residents. Any concerns about affiliate behavior or other community-facing issues can and should be brought to the Office of Government and Community Affairs, or email covidresource@columbia.edu.

All decisions related to campus density and activity are overseen by a data-driven task force comprised of leading Public Health experts and senior university administrators.

Transparency

- 23) What health and tracing data will be available to the public? Will Columbia disclose how many COVID-19 tests were administered each week? How many came back positive?

Effective August 18th, the [University COVID-19 Resource Guide](#) website lists data on testing and testing results on a weekly basis on its homepage.

- 24) Will local Community Board(s) be notified if coronavirus cases are detected among Columbia affiliates on/about campus? How many cases would prompt that notification?

All testing data is posted on the [University COVID-19 Resource Guide](#) website. The University will respond to any additional requests from local Community Boards.

Contingency Plans

- 25) What metrics will you use to determine if a change in circumstance necessitates closure of campus? Will you look at cases or deaths? Will you look at rates of infection, spread, hospitalization, or death among Columbia affiliates, the surrounding zip codes, NYC or State wide?
- 26) What other metrics or thresholds will you use to gauge if the procedures in place are working, or if adjustments to campus operations need to be made?

We are monitoring the R_t in NYC, PCR positivity in NYC, and the number of COVID cases hospitalizations and deaths, as well as the results of our own testing and the strict adherence with public health and safety measures on campus, will guide the University's decisions on operations.

- 27) What preliminary plans have been made for how campus would shut down if it becomes necessary?

The monitoring of metrics will inform scale-back or shutdown of activities, and will include daily number of COVID-19 cases in NYC and on campus; PCR positivity in NYC and on campus; R_t in NYC and on campus; and other indicators will be used to determine how the University will monitor and adjust its safety measures that might ultimately lead to a shutdown.

If the R_t on campus is greater than 1.0 and/or higher than the R_t in NYC by 50%, the University will modify campus density and restrict students to campus as well as reinforce face covering and physical distancing requirements. Testing frequency and approach may also need to be modified.