
Subject: COVID-19 UPDATE: July 31, 2020 – Fall Plan Update

Date: Friday, July 31, 2020 at 12:07:28 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: President Lugo

To: All-faculty-staff, AllStudents

Dear Queens Community,

I write you today with an important update to our plan for the fall semester and the possibility of our return to campus. It is with profound sadness and disappointment that I let you know we have made the decision to move to 100% virtual instruction for the fall semester, with no residential experience. While the implications of this direction certainly present unwanted changes and challenges, the decision has, unfortunately, become an obvious one. We have always said we will make decisions with our collective health and safety as our top priority. As we evaluate the current near crisis state of the coronavirus in our region and use the best information accessible to forecast the potential impact of the virus on our community this fall, there is no way to safely introduce thousands of people to our campus and to ensure our safety throughout the fall.

With the support of the executive committee of our board, the senior leadership reached this conclusion last night. In the spirit of continued transparency, I will share a few of the most important factors that influenced this very difficult decision. When we rolled out our return plan earlier this month, we emphasized our need for both humility in the face of this pandemic and agility to respond to a very fluid landscape. We also determined three factors that would drive our decision making, and a set of criteria we would monitor to determine if we needed to change course.

First, we asked, would the pandemic pose a significant threat to the health and safety of our students and employees? More specifically, we wanted to make sure our campus community could be reasonably safe in Charlotte, and that students and employees would have access to care when they need it. To evaluate this, we monitored local and regional trends including the trajectory of new cases, the positive testing rate, total hospitalizations, the trajectory of hospitalizations, and the capacity of our local hospitals and ICUs. Here's what we found:

- The South is particularly hard hit, with most southern states, including North Carolina, currently on the national hot spot list.
- Our county is the largest county in the state with the highest number of infections and COVID related hospitalizations are at record highs.
- The trends for daily new cases, hospitalizations and deaths made a sharp spike in the South during the month of July.

In summary, our surrounding area's experience with the pandemic has worsened over the last month and is not showing promise for dramatic improvement in the coming month. It is also noteworthy that most epidemiologists predict that fall activity for the virus will be worse.

Next, we asked if Queens would be able to effectively execute on the Royal Return plan? As information has evolved on testing, the answer to this important question became a clear 'no'. As you know, our plan for a successful return heavily depended on our ability to test everyone before initial campus entry to prevent the introduction of many COVID cases and to implement a program for weekly randomized testing to quickly identify, contact trace, and isolate asymptomatic cases that develop during the semester.

As you likely have heard, access to testing and timely results have become a major national challenge. Currently in our area, the availability of testing and the turnaround time on results are woefully insufficient. This summer, testing turnaround times have exceeded seven days. Recent research

shows that once testing turnaround times exceed three days, even perfect contact tracing efforts are rendered ineffective to prevent the possibility of significant community spread. This is especially problematic for residential facilities with a finite amount of space to quarantine infected and potentially infected individuals. The lack of access to testing with accurate and expedient results puts our re-entry plan in jeopardy.

We are proud of the hard, thoughtful work embodied in our return plan as well as our incredibly beneficial partnership with Novant Health. This planning and partnership will remain of great value as we anticipate needing both for a return to campus for the spring semester.

Finally, we asked ourselves, will the pandemic and our required mitigation efforts substantially diminish the quality of the on-campus educational experience? Sadly, this answer is yes. While we have been aware that reduced residential density and significantly curtailed in-person activities would change our on-campus student life experience, we have come to learn more information that suggests the in-person and hybrid learning experience will also be compromised. About two-thirds of our faculty are either teaching fully online due to their elevated risk of COVID complications or have indicated via survey that they would prefer to teach online. What's more, the significant investment we made in additional classroom technology to enable robust hybrid courses has been delayed from a promised July delivery to October, due to COVID-related production and shipping delays.

In summary, all three of our factors led us to the same decision – to move all instruction to distance learning.

Here are some other details you need to know:

Academic Calendar

The academic calendars will remain as scheduled.

On-Campus Housing

Students should not plan to live on campus. Certain exceptions to on-campus housing and instruction may be made for hardships and specialized programs (e.g., an international student already here who can't travel home; or a nursing student who will still have in-person clinicals at approved sites). [Here is a form](#) to fill out if you believe you have an exception.

Student Travel to Campus

If you are already on campus or on your way, contact Student Life or the Myrta Pulliam Center for International Education and we will carefully help you make the best plan to either return home or find temporary accommodations. If you have purchased a plane ticket but haven't departed, contact your airline for a credit that you can use to come to campus later when it is safe.

Charges

For students who were planning to live on campus, your student account will be updated to reflect a credit for portions of room and board not covered by aid. Please note, your aid package is based on total cost of attendance, which is now lower without room and board. This change will be reflected in the coming weeks.

Employees

Staff should continue to work in their current arrangement and work with their division leader and vice president if circumstances or the demands of their job have changed. If you can accomplish your work remotely, continue to do so. If you need access to campus and are not on the essential employee list, please complete [this request form](#). Faculty who need access to campus should [complete this form](#). All meetings should continue to happen via Ring Central.

Athletics

The decision to move to distance learning with no residential experience means that we will not participate in sports this fall. We will continue to monitor that situation to determine if there is an opportunity for athletes participating in winter sports to return to campus. We will be in touch again if there is a conference decision to postpone competition to a later date.

We are certain you will have more questions. Please continue to check our website and look for follow up emails on specific topics. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we navigate these challenging and unprecedented times together.

I know many of you are disappointed. I am heartbroken. I hope that our transparency and commitment to your health and safety soothes and balances your disappointment and leaves you with the confidence that we care about you, and the trust to bring you back safely when the time is right.

Sincerely,

Daniel G. Lugo, President
[Queens University of Charlotte](#)