

MSCHE COVID-19 Institutional Response Survey (Summer/Fall 2020)

Introduction

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) member institutions and their students, faculty, and staff have quickly and innovatively shown tremendous resilience and resolve during the challenging times created by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The Commission was interested in garnering responses from its membership to determine how institutions adjusted to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The Commission was also interested in the ongoing concerns that institutions may have so that the Commission could provide resources, support, and programming to assist with those areas of concern.

The survey was issued as part of three-pronged approach to gathering information from institutions as it relates to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The other components were additional questions that were added to the Annual Institutional Update (AIU) and institutional responses to a list of required notifications.

Key Findings

On June 30, 2020, MSCHE distributed a survey to the presidents of its then-526 member institutions to gauge the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Specifically, the survey explored the institutions' responses to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, concerns regarding the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and perceptions of MSCHE support. In the month the survey was open, 345 institutions (66 percent) responded to the survey with a 91 percent completion rate. Responses to this survey were comprised of 153 from public institutions, 176 from private non-profit institutions, and 16 from private for-profit institutions. This translates to a 75 percent response rate from public institutions, a 59 percent response rate from private non-profit institutions, and a 73 percent response rate from private for-profit institutions.

Results from this survey reflect the adjustments made by MSCHE institutions in response to an unprecedented coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to safely continue quality education and minimize disruptions for their students. The Commission thanks all member institutions for the extraordinary efforts taken this year.

Key findings from the survey include:

Efforts taken by member institutions in spring 2020:

- 43 percent of institutions implemented remote-work policies
- 36 percent closed campus buildings
- 29 percent moved in-person classes online, and
- 27 percent expanded online resources.

Institutions plan to innovate and adapt responses to the pandemic beyond fall 2020:

- 62 percent of member institutions will expand online learning resources for their students, and
- 37 percent will expand student online health resources.

The top five concerns of institutions were (from a pre-populated list):

- the health of students, faculty, and staff (31 percent),
- the inequitable impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on underrepresented students (30 percent),
- decline in future enrollment (28 percent),
- overall financial stability (24 percent), and
- short-term unbudgeted financial costs (20 percent).

Public institutions are more concerned about decline in future enrollment and overall financial stability than are private non-profit and private for-profit institutions.

Member institutions are most likely to benefit from future MSCHE support, resources, or programming in areas focused on substantive change, emerging credentials, data, and assessment.

It is important to note that these responses were provided in July of 2020. As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic remains ongoing, the institutional responses should be viewed as a snapshot in time when MSCHE member institutions were making plans and predictions, and continuously updating responses to a still-unfolding situation.

Actions Taken by Institutions Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Graph 1

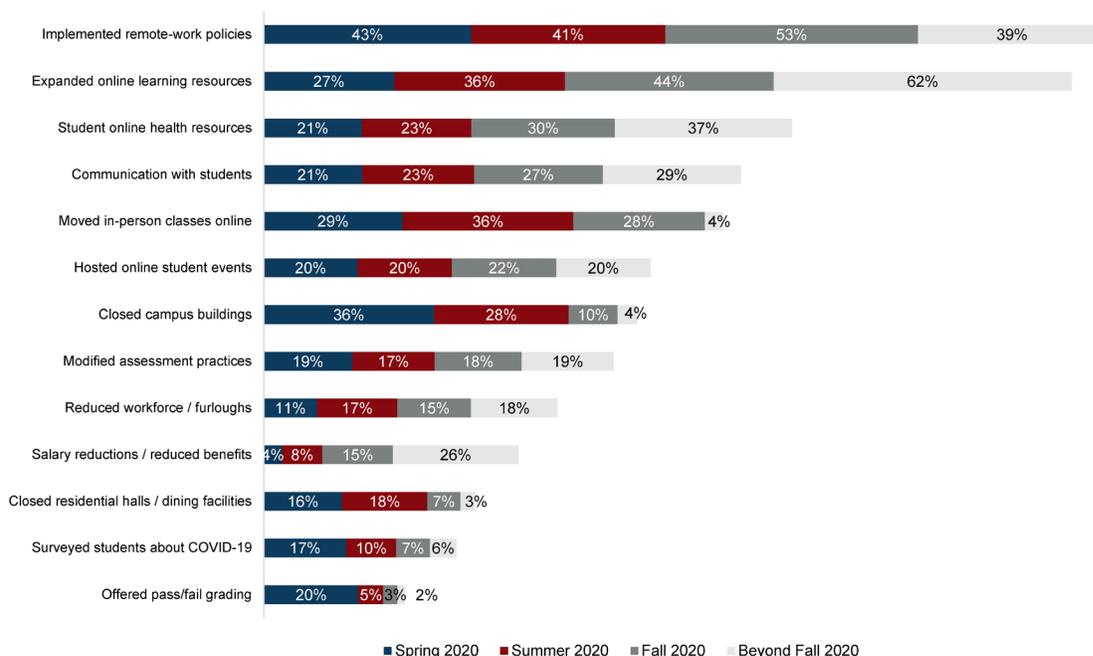
The survey asked member institutions to report on the types of actions taken in spring 2020 and summer 2020 in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and which actions institutions might take in the future. Member institutions reported making a variety of changes since March 2020, due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In Graph 1, the percentage of institutions that reported taking, or possibly taking, an action in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic during spring 2020, summer 2020, fall 2020, and beyond fall 2020, are represented. The blue bars represent the percentage of institutions that reported taking an action in spring 2020, the red bars represent the percentage taking an action in summer 2020, the dark grey bars represent fall 2020, and the light grey bars represent beyond fall 2020.

Responses show that during spring 2020, many institutions implemented remote-work policies (43 percent), closed campus buildings (36 percent), moved in-person classes online (29 percent), and expanded online resources (27 percent). These survey responses reflected the efforts of member institutions implemented in an extremely short period of time. In response to the necessary shutdowns caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, institutions were able to quickly move instruction online and direct resources toward continuing quality instruction and services for their students.

Graph 1 also presents evidence that member institutions plan to adapt their response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as time progresses. Institutions already plan to continue increased resourcing of online learning resources – beyond fall 2020, 62 percent of member institutions will expand online learning resources

Graph 1: Since March 2020, Our Institution Took the Following Actions Due to COVID-19
(322 responses)



for their students, and 37 percent will expand student online health resources. Institutions were optimistic that they will be able to resume face-to-face operations, as only 3 percent of institutions foresaw closing residential halls and dining facilities beyond fall 2020, only 4 percent foresaw online classes beyond fall 2020, and only 4 percent foresaw closed campus buildings beyond fall 2020. Again, we note that these responses reflected predicted actions as of July 2020, and many institutions may have modified their courses of action due to the changing nature of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Many institutions are considering difficult decisions as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic progresses. Although few institutions instituted salary reductions and reductions in employment benefits in spring 2020 (4 percent), up to 26 percent of institutions reported that these actions are possible beyond fall 2020. As of July 2020, 15 percent of institutions foresaw that fall 2020 might bring furloughs and reductions in workforce.

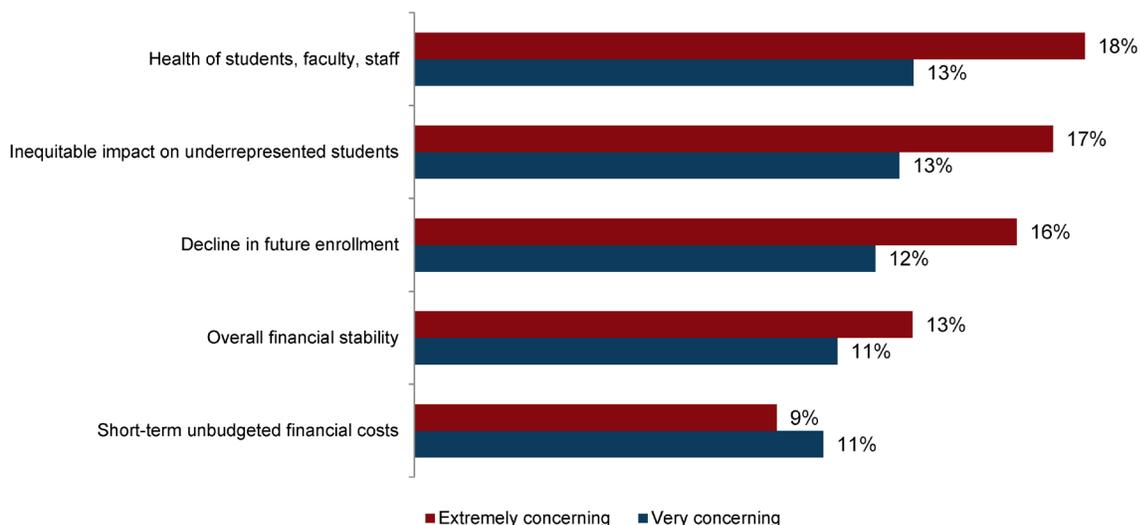
Institutional Concerns Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Graph 2

MSCHE institutions were asked to share concerns related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Graph 2 shows the top five concerns of member institutions from among a list of pre-populated concerns. Of the 322 institutions that responded to this survey question, 31 percent were extremely or very concerned about the health of their students, faculty, and staff, 30 percent were extremely or very concerned about the inequitable impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on underrepresented students, 28 percent of institutions about the decline in future enrollment, 24 percent about the overall financial stability, and 20 percent about the short-term unbudgeted financial costs.

Despite MSCHE’s diversity in the types of institutions it accredits, all institutions reported the same top five immediate concerns due to COVID-19.

The majority of institutions, of all types, reported being concerned about the health of their students, faculty, and staff (79 percent of public, 69 percent of private non-profit, 69 percent of private for-profit). However, public institutions were more concerned about the potential decline in future enrollment (80 percent of public, 58 percent of private non-profit, 44 percent of private for-profit) and overall financial stability (71 percent of public, 49 percent of private non-profit, 31 percent of private for-profit), than were private non-profit and private for-profit institutions.

Graph 2: Proportion of Choices Selected for Institutions' Top Five Immediate Concerns due to COVID-19 (322 responses)



Future Support: Graph 3

Finally, member institutions were asked what areas of future MSCHE support, resources, and programming would be most helpful.

Member institutions responded that they are most likely to benefit from future MSCHE support, resources, or programming areas focused on data and assessment (16 percent of institutions selected substantive change, 13 percent of institutions selected institutional planning and assessment, 12 percent selected student learning assessment, and 10 percent selected leveraging data for planning).

In response to not only the travel limitations imposed by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic but also the need to reach more members in a broader manner, MSCHE pivoted to an all virtual delivery of its webinars and trainings and registered a strong response.

A President-Provost Virtual Meeting on September 15, 2020, reached 650 participants representing more than 400 domestic and international institutions and state systems.

A Town Hall on September 21, 2020, had an even broader reach attracting 1,268 participants from 502 domestic and international institutions, institutions outside of our formerly defined region; and a number of other outside organizations.

A schedule of upcoming free and fee-based webinars and trainings can be found at <https://www.msche.org/events>.

Graph 3: Choices Selected Most Often for Future MSCHE Support, Resources, Programming (296 responses)



Institutional Innovation / Qualitative Responses

It is clear that the response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic accelerated many innovations in and out of the classroom to meet the needs of changed campus communities. When in-classroom learning resumes, changes adopted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will have an indelible impact on how higher education meets the needs of faculty, staff, and students.

Below are selected responses provided by institutions to open ended questions such as:

- If your institution had positive experiences with this transition, please describe them.
 - Please specify how your institution modified its academic assessment practices in response to COVID-19.
- As a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the College fast-tracked a plan to create a virtual student support center. What initially was to be developed over the course of the upcoming year was created and launched in just a few weeks, resulting in a robust online one-stop shop for students and prospective students to access advisement, library resources, technology assistance, math/physics/writing centers, tutoring, financial aid, testing, mental health and emergency resources, career services, student life activities, wellness, and disability support.
 - Despite the incredible challenges presented by transition: (1) strong on-line instructors functioned as mentors for those with less experience; (2) college was able to provide devices to students and faculty; (3) faculty and staff creatively found ways to engage students, including use of peer mentors for freshmen students; (4) departments that had previously resisted automation were thrust into necessary change, which will ultimately serve students more effectively and efficiently; (5) new Strategic Plan, which was approved by governance during transition, set a strong direction for the College during and after transition.
 - Not only did our faculty collaborate with each other to provide innovative teaching to students, but our Student Affairs offices were innovative in their approaches to providing excellent student service in a remote environment. Examples include, but are not limited to, career service drop-in hours and employer meet-and-greets, campus visit days and general information sessions, student activities, the establishment of an intercollegiate E-Sports athletic team, remote counseling and accommodations for students with disabilities, and curbside textbook pickup. A laptop loaner program was also implemented for students who did not own a mobile device and a grocery store gift card program was created to assist students with food insecurities.
 - Student retention through the end of the spring semester was stronger than typical.
 - Many students gained personal confidence as they made the adjustment to a new mode of learning. The experience reinforced the importance of intangible skills like persistence and adaptability.
 - Done rapidly--Did not miss a single day of instruction Faculty/students found new and creative approaches to teaching and learning.
 - Strong online faculty functioned as mentors for those with less experience.
 - The college community has shown great agility, creativity, and innovation throughout these difficult times.

- Developed training and pedagogy opportunities that will serve the University after COVID.
- Faculty, staff, and students came together in a time of crisis to support each other and the institutional mission.
- The entire campus pulled together to creatively make changes in delivery while continuing to support student learning and success.
- Faculty and students showed great resilience.
- Formed dedicated response teams to respond to student concerns.
- Overcame long standing campus resistance to expanding online offerings. Many faculty have found they enjoy teaching online.
- Student retention through the end of the spring semester was stronger than typical.
- I was pleasantly surprised with the results of this trial by fire.

Next Steps

MSCHE will continue to monitor the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the changing higher educational environment, on its membership. The Commission intends to collect additional information from institutions using a variety of strategies to continue to understand the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic's impact, support institutions in future decisions, and share resources.