

Provost's Advisory Council
Thursday, October 8, 2020
8:30-10:00 a.m. - Zoom

In attendance:

Sharon Beckman (Chair)	Christian Guma	Gilda Morelli
Anthony Annunziato	Angela Harkins	Karen Muncaster
Michelle Elias Bloomer	Dewin Hernandez	David Quigley
Joseph Carroll	Regine Jean-Charles	Tracy Regan
Mary Ellen Carter	Gregory Kalscheur, S.J.	Ronnie Sadka
Thomas Chiles	William Keane	Akua Sarr
Thomas Crea	Thomas Kohler	David Scanlon
Joseph Du Pont	Adam Krueckeberg	Billy Soo
Kristin Flower	Jonathan Laurence	Thomas Stegman, S.J.
Yonder Gillihan	Karen Lyons	Sasha Tomic
Stacy Grooters	John Mahoney	Thomas Wall

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- 1. The summary of the September 10, 2020 meeting was approved.** It will be sent to the President's Office. All summaries are posted on the Provost's Office website; members are encouraged to share them with colleagues.
 - 2. COVID-19 Testing Protocol: Douglas Comeau, Director of University Health Services and Welkin Johnson, Chairperson of the Biology Department**

Billy Soo introduced Douglas Comeau, Director of University Health Services, and Welkin Johnson, Professor and Chair of the Biology Department, to discuss BC's COVID-19 testing approach and experiences from the fall semester thus far.

Doug began with an overview of the testing strategy. Prior to the beginning of the semester, all faculty, staff, and students were tested over a two-week period. During that period, approximately 18,000 tests were conducted with 11 positive results. Once the semester began, the approach shifted to targeted and strategic testing. A large pool of high contact departments and individuals was identified for surveillance testing, and approximately 40-50% of that group is selected to be tested each week. Faculty, staff, and students not identified as high contact are also included in the random selection of individuals tested each week.

BC had been exclusively using the Broad Institute for testing. The Broad utilizes the PCR test and is able to return results in 6-26 hours. As of this week, the BC Microbiology Lab (BCML) is now online, provides on-campus testing capacity, and allows for quick and efficient identification of infected students, and helps expedite contact tracing.

University Health Services (UHS) has been divided into two separate clinics, with a designated space for those with COVID related symptoms. Students reporting symptoms through the BC Check App will receive instructions to call UHS and will be given a same-

day appointment to be seen and evaluated. Symptomatic students are removed from their dorm and await their results in the Cabaret Room in Vanderslice Hall. Staff begin contact tracing on symptomatic students immediately to allow any close contacts to be screened and tested. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health recommends close contacts be tested on days 4-6 after exposure. BC is also testing those individuals on days 0-1 to ensure they are not already positive. BC maintains quarantine facilities at Hotel Boston in Brighton and isolation space at Pine Manor College.

Following the cluster earlier in the semester, surveillance testing was increased, and all undergraduates were tested over a two-week period. Since then, 6,000-8,000 tests are being conducted weekly. The low number of positive cases indicates that the surveillance testing approach is working, and the right individuals are being targeted for testing. Contact tracing is done in consultation with the Community Tracing Collaborative, which is helpful as BC's campus falls within three municipalities. Forty-six staff members have taken the Johns Hopkins training course and assist with contact tracing on campus. Results of all tests are sent to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Welkin Johnson discussed some points of confusion and provided clarifications on terminology.

- Negative Test Result: the virus is not detected (this does not necessarily mean the individual is uninfected)
- Positive Test Result: the virus is detected, indicating an ongoing or recent infection
- Quarantine: separation of potentially exposed persons for monitoring
- Isolation: separation of ill persons who have received a positive SARS-COV-2 test

Welkin continued, discussing the timeline of infection. During the first few days after exposure, an individual is unlikely to test positive or be contagious. Four to five days after exposure, individuals will begin to test positive and are able to transmit the virus. Those who have been exposed but test negative must quarantine. Isolation results when an individual has tested positive. Most contact tracing looks back a day or two prior to onset of symptoms or a positive result. If an individual is not contacted, it is likely that the last point of contact was outside of that window.

Welkin discussed the difference between a cluster and an outbreak. A cluster involves an aggregation of cases in place and time exceeding the expected number. An outbreak is similar to an epidemic, but the term is used for a more limited geographic area. During the second week of the semester, there was an increase in positive tests and through contact tracing it became obvious that the cluster was related to a small number of student gatherings. Students were identified and moved into isolation or quarantine as necessary, and testing results quickly returned to the baseline established at the start of the semester.

A council member asked whether there is a distinction between those who are regularly working on campus and those who are approved to work entirely remote for selection in the group identified weekly for random testing.

Doug answered that the randomization is done by ITS, and those individuals who are fully remote do not need to be tested and should not get the email regarding testing. If they do receive the email, there is a process to apply for an exemption from random testing.

Billy added that there are several groups of students (such as those who are involved in field placements and clinical placements) who are tested at a much higher rate. There is a challenge with faculty and staff who have sought exemptions as they may still be coming to campus periodically. Anyone who plans to be on campus is subject to random testing.

A council member asked what the usual timing is of test results.

Doug responded that results from the Broad Institute are generally returned within 6-26 hours, depending on when the sample was delivered. Questions about results can be directed to COVIDtesting@bc.edu.

A council member asked if faculty can request to be tested, and whether faculty who are teaching classes with larger enrollments or are more regularly on campus are tested more frequently.

Doug responded that faculty are not generally considered to be in the high-risk pool as classrooms are configured to allow for social distancing at the front of the class. There are at least 100 faculty members randomly screened each week.

A council member suggested that social distancing in smaller classrooms is difficult and noted that they have not been contacted despite knowing of students in their class who have tested positive.

Doug responded that tracing relies on the patient to report and identify their close contacts.

Welkin added that in addition to the standard criteria for contact tracing of distance and time of contact, the tracer will consider how long ago the class last met and may determine that there was no contact while the student was contagious. He noted that there has thus far been no evidence of spread in the classroom and most of the BC positive cases can be attributed to specific clusters.

A council member suggested that there is significant anxiety among the faculty that students are not following the rules or accurately judging distance, and wondered if a separate testing protocol could be put in place for faculty to be tested if they are concerned about contact with infected students.

Welkin responded that testing should not be used for a measure of behavior and that it is only effective when coupled with tracing and behavior modifications. He added that a negative test result evaluates a moment in time, and an individual can test negative one day and positive the next. Additionally, increased testing often results in a relaxed attitude and false sense of security.

Doug added that if there are specific concerns or cases of contact and exposure that are not being correctly reported by the students, faculty should reach out to Billy Soo or to UHS via the COVIDtesting@bc.edu. Faculty who are symptomatic should work with their primary care physician to be tested.

A council member asked if there is a threshold of positivity for acceptability of meeting in person.

Doug answered that the positive rates are evaluated daily and week-to-week to look for escalating trends. There is the capacity to scale up testing as needed, as well as to quarantine and isolate students.

David added that there are a range of interventions that can be implemented as the situation evolves.

A council member asked if students who are quarantining or isolating at home are tested by BC upon their return to campus.

Doug responded that those students would be tested prior to leaving and upon their return.

A council member asked how faculty are being notified of students who are in quarantine or isolation.

Akua Sarr responded that student affairs is providing a list of students who are in quarantine or isolation with the date of notification. Faculty will receive a notification alerting them that the student(s) will be absent from class for at least 10-14 days. The notification will not specify if the student has tested positive or not. The absences should not preclude remote learning. She added that there have been no cases of students being infected in the classroom at this point.

Billy added that there have also been no cases of faculty being infected in the classroom.

A council member asked about how often high-touch graduate students are being tested and suggested that the communication strategy and transparency surrounding testing and the increased positivity could be improved.

Doug noted that a number of graduate students are in the high-touch group for regular testing and that at least 40% of that group is tested weekly. He added that the information provided on the dashboard aligns with how many schools are reporting their testing data.

David added that University Communications has been updating the community on a regular basis and will continue to do so. The focus on undergraduate test results reflects concern from a public health standpoint of that specific population due to close living conditions on campus.

A council member expressed concern regarding the ability for students to safely gather on campus in a larger group than is currently allowed under the revised guest policy.

Joe Dupont noted that Student Affairs is working on creative uses of space, especially outdoors, for students to gather in a socially distant manner. He noted that the current guest policy is more generous than most other local institutions.

3. Provost's Report: David Quigley, Provost and Dean of Faculties

Billy Soo discussed guidance on conducting final exams this semester. The presumption is that courses that are online and asynchronous would offer the final exam online and asynchronously as well. A number of faculty would like to give their exams during a more restricted time period. In those instances, the suggestion is that the exam window be open for a sufficient length of time (minimum of 36 hours) to provide flexibility for students who have multiple exams in one day. The existing exam policy allows students with more than two exams in a day to move one of the exams to a make-up day. The exam that is moved is generally the common exam, which in most cases would be the asynchronous class exam. The other course modalities are straight forward, but conflicts resulting from a shortened asynchronous exam will need to be accommodated by the asynchronous class.

Billy continued, discussing the lactation rooms available on campus. The question was raised last year about availability and inventory of rooms on campus. There is a Human Resources committee that looks at these questions. There are currently twelve dedicated rooms on campus that can be used for this purpose, six wellness/lactation rooms and six dual-use rooms. There are four additional office and conference room spaces that may be used, and the Schiller Institute will have dedicated space when completed. Six of the spaces are on the Chestnut Hill campus, five are on the Brighton campus, and one is on the Newton campus. Given the limited inventory, rooms should be reserved, and there is a contact list on the Human Resources website for reserving space. The goal is to increase the number of dedicated rooms on campus.

A council member suggested the committee should consider the legal requirements and explore standard practices at peer universities. Another council member suggested that issues relating to access to the spaces, for example obtaining a key to the space after hours during evening classes, need to be considered as well.

Billy responded that the committee is working to identify additional space to increase the number of dedicated rooms with adequate facilities including a sink, refrigerator, lock, etc. He added that the question of locks and ability to use the spaces after hours is under consideration. One possibility is to equip the rooms with a combination lock or to have keys available for pick up in advance, but the room would still need to be reserved.

David provided some updates on the end of the fall semester and planning for the spring semester.

Instruction will continue through Thanksgiving. A decision on post-Thanksgiving plans will be announced in mid-October.

Planning is underway for the spring semester, which will likely look like the fall semester in terms of teaching modalities. Adjustments to the spring academic calendar are being considered, with the goal of moving the start of the semester to the end of January. By eliminating the weeklong spring break, reducing the time off surrounding the Easter holiday, and holding classes on Patriots Day, the start of the semester could be pushed back to January 28, 2021. Exams would proceed as currently scheduled. Commencement would remain on May 24 in a format to be determined based on the public health situation and guidance come spring 2021. Spring study abroad will likely be cancelled, with an announcement on that coming soon.

Accommodations from the fall will carry forward for faculty, students, and staff. If there are new accommodation requests, faculty should be in touch with the Office for Institutional Diversity as soon as possible to allow for decisions on course modalities in advance of spring course registration.

Events and meetings will likely remain remote for much of the spring semester, with the potential for more outdoor activities to resume as the semester progresses. Questions remain surrounding student and faculty recruitment as the year progresses. Faculty recruitment will be done mostly via Zoom, with finalists potentially traveling to campus for a mix of remote and small group meetings.

Sharon concluded the meeting, thanking the group for bringing forward ideas and concerns for discussion at future meetings.