Decision-Making Prepandemic: University Curtailment of Academic Operations Closure Processes During the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak

**Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for University Leadership Representatives**

**Introduction**

This interview is part of a study of college and university curtailment of academic operations decisions made during the novel coronavirus outbreak of 2019-2020. This project aims to understand perspectives of key stakeholders regarding how decisions to curtail academic operations were made during COVID-19 and how such processes can be improved in the future to best protect public health and safety.

You have been identified as someone who was responsible as a key stakeholder significantly involved in your University/College’s curtailment of academic operations decision-making process during COVID-19.

This interview is designed to last approximately 30 minutes, depending on how the discussion goes. You may stop the interview at any time. I will be taking notes and referring to this guide in front of me to ensure I don’t miss anything I wanted to ask you. With your consent, I will record and transcribe this interview. When this project is completed I can provide you with the final abstract and/or a full copy of the report.

Do you consent to participate in and have this interview recorded?

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

**QUESTIONS**

**Overview**

1. What is your position and role at your university/college?
2. Tell me about your experience during COVID-19. What was your role?
3. Do you have previous experience with university/college curtailment of academic operations, perhaps from a hurricane, other natural disaster or active shooter?

**Response**

1. How has your university responded to COVID-19? Tell me about the extent of your university’s curtailment of services.

* *Prompt:* What services were suspended or curtailed (e.g. suspension of i**n-person classes**, prohibiting public gatherings, community events/meetings, domestic and/or international institutionally-related travel for faculty or students, required internships, etc.)
* *Prompt:* What activities remained operational (e.g., security, residential life, laboratory staff, maintenance staff, clinical rotations for students pursuing healthcare degrees)?

1. At what point in time did your institution decide to alter operations (e.g., when the first cases occurred in the United States, when a case occurred in your state or among a member of the university community, at the direction of the local/state/federal government, secondary to other university/college curtailment of academic operations)?

**Decision**

1. Can you describe to me when you first heard about the COVID-19 outbreak? At what point did you start to think about its impact your institution?
2. How did your university/college decide to close, suspend or curtail services during COVID-19? What processes were used to reach this decision?

*Prompt:* Who made the decision (e.g., President, Provost)?

*Prompt:* Did divisions within the University initially have some leeway?

*Prompt:* What committees, deans or other officials (e.g. Board of Trustees) were consulted?

*Prompt*: Was there agreement or consensus about the decision to close your university/college?

1. How did you assess risk to determine whether you should close, suspend or curtail operations?

*Prompt*: What risks were you concerned about (e.g., foreign students who could not travel home, financially at-risk students who may have impacted housing and food security, lost academic productivity among the faculty and students, impacts to student progress towards graduation and university reputation)?

*Prompt*: How did you assess risks to student, faculty and staff safety and health posed by curtailing academic operations at the university/college?

1. What influenced your decision to curtail academic operations?

*Prompt:* What information or data informed the decision?

*Prompt:* What other factors influenced the decision to curtail academic operations (e.g., cost, politics, social pressure, pressure from faculty, concern for safety of students/faculty)? How did curtailing of academic operations at peer institutions impact your decision?

*Prompt:* What was the ultimate reason for curtailing academic operations?

1. What guidance or emergency plans did you use to help you decide whether or not to curtail academic operations at your institution (e.g., guidance from CDC, WHO, State Office of Emergency Management, White House Coronavirus Taskforce, etc)?
2. What were the implications of curtailing academic operations at the university/college?

*Prompt:*Do you anticipate additional future costs from these actions, such as refunded tuition, housing fees, reduced research products/output or other?

1. How do you believe university/college decision-making can be improved in the future?

*Prompt:* What additional information or guidance would you have wanted to inform your decision?

*Prompt*: How can decision processes be improved to better protect the safety and health of students, faculty and staff during future emergencies?

*Prompt*: In hindsight, were there any stakeholders whose input was not solicited that could be in the future?

*Prompt*: Thinking specifically about the interaction between the government and universities, what guidance from government agencies would be useful in making these decisions in the future?

1. How can policies related to university closure or curtailment be improved?

*Prompt:* Was it clear who had authority to make these decisions?

*Prompt:* Are current policies related to university/college emergencies in general, and for curtailment of operations specifically, sufficient? Are current policies effective?

**CLOSING REMARKS**

* This conversation has been very helpful. Those are all the questions that I have for you today. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
* Would you mind if I contacted you again if I have any follow-up questions?
  + *If ok to contact informant again, ask*: What is the best way to reach you for follow-up?
* Is there anyone I should talk to from this institution or other institutions in order to learn more?
  + *If they identify additional key informants, ask:* Do you mind if I let them know that you recommended I speak with them?
* Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your time.