A Basic Checklist: Planning for the Coming Term

Educational Model

	Yes	No
1. Have you determined your educational model for the next term (i.e., between now and December 31, 2020)?		
2. If not yet decided, do you have a date by which you will announce your decision?		

<u>Notes</u>: For U.S. colleges this fall, *Inside Higher Education* has described 15 possibilities for reopening – three main categories with variations (e.g., delayed starts, hybrid approaches, etc.).

1. Resume normal teaching on campus (with enhanced sanitation requirements and social distancing).

2. Teach online in the fall, then resume normal operations in January 2021. This approach requires more significant online engagement but extends the current tactic of temporary online programs until on-campus meetings can resume.

3. Remain online for the 2020-2021 academic year and possibly longer.

Some schools have considered splitting the first term in half, with the first part of the term continuing online modes and the second part resuming face-to-face classes if conditions allow.

Some schools may consider the uncertainty of the next six months to be so high that planning for continued online engagement may be preferred. They may be wary of resuming face-to-face classes only to be forced once again into lockdown due to a second wave of infections on campus or in their community.

Regulatory guidance, health concerns, travel restrictions on faculty/staff/students, capacity to offer online education, and budget constraints may also influence decisions about the model of education adopted for the coming term. Timelines for decisions will impact recruitment of new students, retention of current students, faculty preparation, and institutional readiness.

Faculty Support

	Yes	No
3. Have faculty had a structured opportunity to share with one another about what they have learned during the disrupted term?		
4. Have you planned workshops or training sessions for faculty?		
5. Do you plan to offer additional resources to faculty who will continue teaching online (technical support, tutors, etc.)?		
6. Have you adjusted workloads and teaching or research assignments to accommodate changes in the next term?		

Notes: Faculty have had a stressful end to the term with the rapid shift to distance learning. They have had to adapt courses on the fly, often piecing together multiple learning platforms and communication structures to reach students. In addition, they have cared for their own families during the lockdown, worried about health concerns (particularly for those in vulnerable demographics), and faced financial stress. If courses remain online (either as the primary delivery mode or as hybrid), how can the institution support faculty? How can it help them as they continue to teach in what, for many, is a new environment that requires additional preparation? Faculty will likely require extra time for course preparation, development of new assessments and resources, and interaction with students for academic and spiritual mentoring.

Student Engagement

	Yes	No
7. Do students have adequate internet access and functional devices for sustained online learning?		
8. Has the institution planned to address issues related to spiritual formation, chapel, mentoring, and other aspects of campus life in a distance format?		
9. Do you have a plan to track student participation, mitigate attrition, and increase course completion rates?		
10. Will you offer additional orientation for students (especially those newly enrolled) studying in online environments?		

	Yes	No
11. Have you offered any additional support to graduating students to help them complete their programs successfully in the coming year?		

Notes: Like faculty, students made an unexpected shift to distance education during lockdowns. Some found success. Others struggled. Schools need to consider factors that will position students for successful learning and spiritual growth as they move into this next term. Further, to sustain fruitful education in online learning modes, schools may need to consider courses' technological aspects. Can students access and interact with content and supplemental materials?

Institutional Preparedness for Sustained Online Learning

	Yes	No
12. Has the school assessed its readiness to engage a sustained online learning program?		
13. Has the school adopted and communicated a consistent platform, approach, and expectations for faculty and students engaged in online learning in the next term?		
14. Does the institution have adequate technological infrastructure and support personnel for online programs?		
15. Can students access adequate library resources remotely?		
16. Can professors access additional online content (videos, etc.) to supplement their teaching?		

Notes: Moving from emergency survival to a more sustained and effective approach to online learning, even if temporary, may require additional institutional investments. Consolidating to a common set of video conferencing, messaging, and learning platforms will increase efficiency for faculty and students. The kinds of additional technical support (including internet bandwidth) needed may depend on whether faculty members can work from campus or must remain at home (for recording classes, leading video conferences, etc.).

Practical Planning

	Yes	No
17. Do you have enrollment estimates for your next term?		
18. Do you need to modify your admission process (change application dates, entrance exams, interviews, fees, etc.)?		
19. Will the school need to adjust course offerings and focus on a narrower group of subjects over the next term?		
20. Do you have plans for accomplishing formational activities (practical ministry, mission trips, etc.) in a distance learning model?		
21. Will non-formal programs (where applicable) require modifications or postponement?		
22. Have accrediting bodies provided additional guidance to ensure that newly designed programs meet their standards?		
23. Does the school have any partnerships that can help with resources or program delivery? (For example, could you collaborate with other schools to share online courses?)		
24. Does the Board need to approve any of the modifications made for this next term?		

Notes: As the school prepares for the next term, considering the needs of two different groups of students may be helpful. Students continuing and completing degrees have a different set of needs than those just starting their programs. Some who dropped out or fell behind in the transition may require additional help. Budget, personnel, and technical limitations may require the school to consider whether it should offer the full array of courses for the next term. One approach may include consolidating courses around the curriculum's primary components and core faculty strengths, with plans to resume the full spectrum of courses further in the future.

	Yes	No
25. Have you written a revised budget that reflects the realities the school will likely face in the next term?		
26. Will students be able to pay their share of tuition this term?		
27. Have you contacted your donors during the crisis?		
28. Have you adjusted revenue projections from income-generating projects (rentals, etc.)?		
29. Have you reviewed cost saving measures to curtail expenses for the next term?		
30. To make the next term successful, will you have to fund investments (video cameras, software licensing, internet upgrades, etc.)?		
31. Do you have a plan if the school enters a deficit?		
32. Have you secured required Board approvals for budget modifications?		

Notes: Almost every school will have to recast their budgets, as the crisis has impacted all sources of income (tuition, local and international donations, third-stream projects). Most schools will face difficult choices to make their budgets work over the next year. School leaders will need to plan for increasing revenue and controlling expenses.

Additional Thoughts Related to Mission and Long-Range Planning

Facing so many uncertainties, schools may need to make unique plans for the coming 1-2 semesters. Some courses, activities, and possibly even new enrollments may need to be delayed until January 2021 or later. The strengths of core faculty, needs of existing students, and ease of transition into online mode can guide decisions about whether and how to consolidate classes.

This period can actually benefit schools that plan to incorporate online learning into their permanent offerings. As they think about this possibility, schools should address some additional questions related to their mission and distinctive characteristics. Many schools see online courses as a way to reach more students. However, students can choose from an ever-increasing array of programs. Therefore, schools must also consider how their distinctive characteristics translate into the virtual environment. Course design, quality assurance, and faculty training will all warrant additional planning.