

Austin Peay State University

A report of actions taken by the APSU COVID-19 Task Force
and related committees and working groups to respond to the
COVID-19 threat March 1 - August 1 2020

**COVID-19
After Action
Report:
leaving campus**

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Introduction

Organization of the After Action Report

The purpose of this After Action Report (AAR) is to drive implementation and evolution of plans, policies, and procedures through a collaborative analysis of focused discussions, distillation of substantive findings, and development of actionable recommendations.

This report provides essential context to the decisions and recommendations made by the APSU COVID-19 Task Force by summarizing details of that group's work. The main focus of the report, "Analysis, Findings, and Recommendations," examines how the task force operated, along with regional higher education initiatives, to provide an understanding for future actions. Observations inform analysis, findings are derived from analysis, and where appropriate specific recommendations are developed to address implications of select findings.



Observations are derived from the COVID-19 AAR Survey distributed to members of the task force. These are the unvarnished opinions and observations of those decision makers. Names and identifiers have been removed. Fifty percent of the task force members responded to the survey.

Analysis provides a critical assessment of the actions taken and the discussions leading up to these decisions.

Findings are statements of fact, conclusions, or key takeaways based on observation and analysis. Findings can be Strengths or Areas for Improvement.

Recommendations provide specific actions that should be considered by a defined agency or department to address implications of select findings. Recommendations are made with an eye toward de-densifying campus or transitioning to entirely remote learning because of a COVID-19 outbreak on campus. The President and Senior Leadership Team will make the decision if all remote learning is required.

APSU Emergency Management will track and follow up on the recommendations organized and prioritized by theme in Appendix C.

Layout and Scope of APSU COVID-19 Task Force

Early in this pandemic, the University's problem-solving efforts were usually done independently within offices and departments. On March 2, 2020, then-APSU President Alisa White formed the COVID-19 Task Force (TF) to encourage collaboration and campus wide decision-making. The TF was charged with making plans "to mitigate the effects of a potential spread of the coronavirus that could impact our students, faculty, and staff. Assistant Vice President Michael Kasitz was asked to chair the task force." The initial TF members are listed below. Appendix A lists all members.

Ronald Bailey, Vice President for External Affairs

Charles Booth, Director of Communication, Public Relations & Marketing

Chad Brooks, Associate Provost and Dean of College of Graduate Studies

Cody Bush, Coordinator, Sports Information

Marissa Chandler, Director of Study Abroad and International Exchange

Amy Corlew, Director, Admissions

Katie Ethridge, Assistant Director of Athletics/Academic Services

Kim French, Associate Professor, School of Nursing

Sheraine Gilliam-Holmes, Executive Director and Chief Human Services Officer

Benjamin Harmon, Associate Vice President for Finance

Tom Hutchins, Director, Physical Plant

Joni Johnson, Head Athletic Trainer

Michael Kasitz, Assistant Vice President for Public Safety

Karen Meisch, Dean, College of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Joe Mills, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs

Kristine Nakutis, Executive Director, Fort Campbell Center

Eric Norman, Vice President for Student Affairs

Bill Persinger, Executive Director for Public Relations & Marketing

Jeff Rutter, Director, Counseling and Health Services

Perry Scanlan, Professor, Allied Health Sciences

Dannelle Whiteside, Vice President for Legal Affairs

Focused Review Formation of the COVID-19 Task Force

Prior to the formation of the TF, several departments and individuals were working independently to resolve issues as they arose. This independent approach did not allow for communication across disciplines, preventing a holistic resolution to these issues.

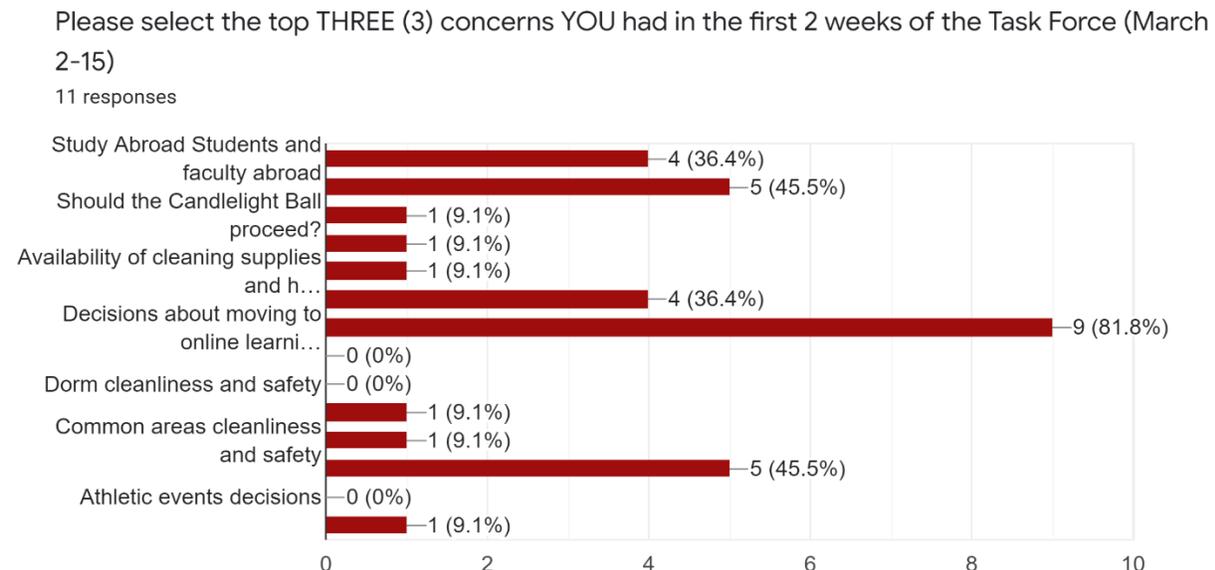
Observations 1

Survey Question: Do you think the TF creation was too early or too late in terms of public opinion? Explanation and comments.

- It was my understanding, APSU was one of the first LGIs to create such a task force.
- I think the consideration of Distance Education serving on the task force took too long. Around March 12 or March 13, [we were asked if we'd] been thinking about COVID planning. Fortunately, we had and [at the time] the plan had already been laid out, but if we hadn't, I think there might have been some delays to our ability to quickly pivot online. Long story short- I think at the time DE was an afterthought. I believe this has since been remedied and the role we play during these times is seen as more important.

Survey Question: Please select the top three concerns you had in the first two weeks of the TF (March 2-15).

Most respondents listed "Decisions about moving to online learning" as their top concern during those first two weeks.



Daily Decision Making

The TF met daily to tackle the most immediate issues affecting the University. Members discussed several issues, including:

- Transitioning to remote learning,
- Bringing Study Abroad students and faculty back to the U.S.,
- Identifying essential and non-essential employees,
- Canceling the 36th Annual Candlelight Ball,
- Analyzing the magnitude of the disease as it spread across the country,
- Evaluating the University's stock of cleaning supplies,
- Developing guidelines for Spring Break travel and return to campus,
- Maintaining dining options for students on campus,
- Developing cleaning protocols for residence halls, classrooms, and common areas,
- Providing resources for all employees working from home,
- Hosting athletic events,
- Delaying the Spring B and Spring II sessions,
- Maintaining the Little Gobs daycare program, and
- The feasibility of offering on-campus events and programming.

Analysis and Findings 1

Sixty percent of respondents said the University's previous handling of the H1N1 outbreak was helpful, but emerging science quickly showed more dissimilarities between the two events. The structure and processes developed in 2009 for the H1N1 outbreak provided a framework for the University's new COVID-19 response. Early in the pandemic, a growing number of daily challenges prompted the TF to form several working groups. These groups focused on specific, complex issues, and they provided context and recommendations to the entire TF.

Bringing APSU faculty and students back to the U.S. from foreign countries, as part of study abroad programs, proved to be particularly challenging. The U.S. began limiting travel to certain countries, and borders began closing all over the world. After many late nights, the University was able to bring all students and faculty safely back to the U.S. by March 20. All Study Abroad students affected by the pandemic received refunds by April 7, 2020.

The TF, working with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Human Resources, defined "essential employees" as "an employee in a position in which they are required to work during an adverse event in order to meet immediate and necessary campus or university functions." Under this definition, department heads were "instructed to determine essential staff who would be required to work in this type of emergency situation and to have an internal notification system in place." This work will inform future emergency responses.

Every day was a learning moment. Not just learning from external agencies but learning how APSU staff/faculty reacted. I personally was NEVER scared of CoV and I'm still not. But, seeing how my friends reacted made me more sensitive and empathetic to their fears. I completely recognize / believe that much of the safety precautions APSU is following provides a "feeling" of safety...which is good.

-Task Force Member

Recommendations 1

- 1.1. Ensure the appropriate voices are in the conversation. Include decision makers and advocates for all three major populations on campus: students, faculty, and staff.
- 1.2. APSU moratorium on international travel went into effect March 9, 2020. Continue to monitor COVID-19 spread globally to make informed decisions about easing restrictions in the future.
- 1.3. Create opportunities for cross collaboration among departments/divisions.
- 1.4. Create agreed upon thresholds for early decision making.

I think a concern here is, as a leader, I had to field many questions and concerns from my team. In March people were becoming very afraid and managing their fears while continuing to work was a challenge. I'm grateful that I have a really dedicated team, but I imagine other departments might have had some challenges depending on the dynamics of their team.

-Task Force Member

Focused Review Online Plan 2020

On March 12, 2020, the University suspended classes until March 23, at which time all instruction moved to a fully online format. Distance Education hosted Zoom trainings to help faculty move their instruction online. On March 15, the SLT approved the Online Plan 2020. At the same time, offices and departments also transition to a telework format. Several challenges arose, including a lack of resources – computers, internet access, software -- for faculty, staff and students working remotely.

Observations 2

Survey Question: What were your concerns regarding a fully online Spring term?

- How would we serve the existing students who cannot move to online only instruction? This included labs, clinicals, student teaching, etc. There was a concern that many low-income students would not have access to computer and internet resources. Given the emergent situation, I think the quality of instruction was a concern, but more about what happens after spring semester.
- Success rate for students who don't like or aren't successful in the online platform. The P/F option probably helped many, but that has consequences.

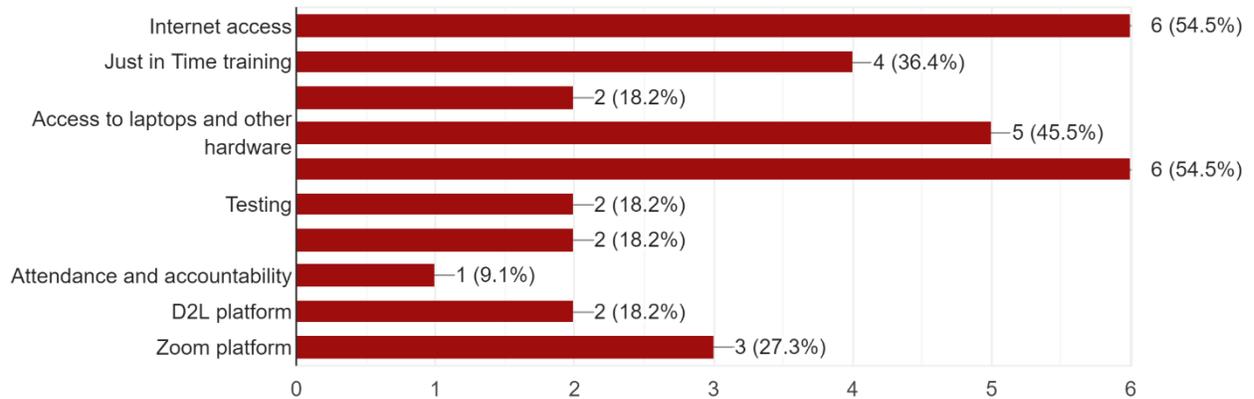
Some offices shut down with no notice making it difficult to continue operations. Without any major local health impacts, the transition to remote work could have been coordinated better. It resulted into, 'why did they do that and we didn't' situations. Transition to online learning impacted many students who had never ventured online for classes. We walked several students through the process before we actually closed the doors. Many students were not prepared to go online due to lack of IT support.

-Task Force Member

Survey Question:

What were the most significant challenges of 'going digital'? Pick your top 3

11 responses



When looking at the challenges of going digital, respondents listed “Internet Access” and “How do you design an online curriculum in a small window of time?” as the main issues. They listed “Access to laptops and other hardware” as the next biggest challenge.

Comments from respondents:

- “Testing would be number 4 if I could select 4. It was something we weren’t prepared for only in that students were very vocal about how they felt regarding online proctoring. We were not prepared for that. The students we normally provide online proctoring to are your standard online student and they are used to it, we were asking our traditionally f2f students to participate in online proctoring and they saw this as a tremendous invasion of technology because they were not used to the technology. We spent a lot of time trying to communicate the basics when we typically did not have to do that. I also think the major inequities present in higher education were majorly highlighted when we went digital and this was made apparent with the hardware concerns.”
- “Not listed above is the concern about faculty who never taught online. Online does not mean ‘hands-off’ instruction. Several complaints about faculty not engaging at all with students, poor pictures that were part of tests that needed to be identified, etc. Online is more labor intensive for faculty and students.”
- “I think the COVID-19 task force was rightly concerned about logistics of dorms, food service, and cleaning. There was not as much concern about the instruction side. Basically, we have to move online so it was a ‘make it work’ moment. This created a situation where the faculty were less prepared. Additionally, how do you assign work to the student that now has to work (still), take care of dependents, and still accomplish their classwork?”
- [A current concern] “Staff going remote.....and now wanting to stay remote.”
- “Students who relied on campus internet and computers were suddenly absent those things.”

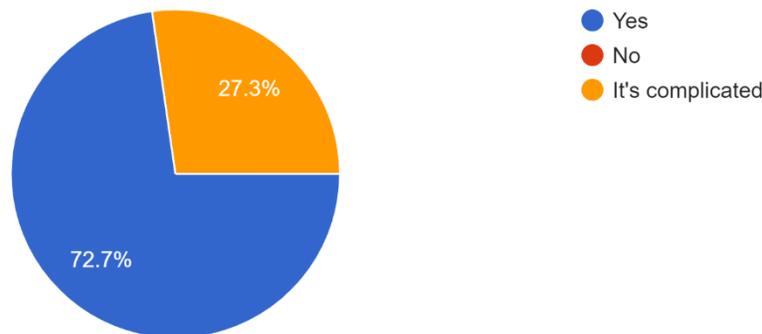
We did it. We completed the semester! That is a huge accomplishment during a very trying time.
 -Task Force Member

- “A strong positive, the laptop loan program was put together in just about 3 days!”
- “We shifted operational goals, objectives, and priorities very quickly and I think very successfully.”

Survey Question:

On March 23rd it was announced that Austin Peay had adopted a Pass/Fail option for students. Did you agree with this decision?

11 responses



Comments from respondents:

- “It took a bit of programming to pull this off - technology wise. This often gets overlooked. It was a good idea but took some work to set up.”
- “I know that many were concerned about how professional schools and graduate schools will view pass/fail classes. I believe history will not penalize these students and being flexible with the students will likely lead to student retention and helping them stick with us.”
- “I believe it had good intentions and gave a lot of relief to stressed and worried students, but it also gave an opt-out mentality to a lot of students. Certainly, it was a time of crisis and everyone was in panic mode, but in some ways it devalued the quality of the education APSU tries to uphold.”

Analysis and Findings 2

Much of the discussion and planning around a fully remote campus focused on instruction, but a full understanding of the issues affecting staff working from home was missing. As problems arose, solutions were developed as quickly as possible. Without a clear plan for de-densifying campus, it became difficult to quickly overcome these challenges.

By March 15, the University launched its “Go Digital” <https://www.apsu.edu/godigital> website to assist faculty and increase training for accessibility regulations and guidelines. Faculty were provided with an online digital toolkit and sample course shells in D2L. The Distance Learning team carried the bulk of the burden for faculty training and support during this quick transition.

Recommendations 2

- 2.1. Develop clear, timely, and concise communication regarding calendar and instructional changes.
- 2.2. Create comprehensive training program for faculty to pivot to remote learning.
- 2.3. Strengthen Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) for all departments to ensure business continues if a physical space is compromised.
- 2.4. Create a comprehensive training program for staff to work from home.
- 2.5. Ensure all employees are technologically prepared to work from home, including upgrading equipment from desktop computers to mobile devices.
- 2.6. Continue to build relationships with external stakeholders to boost internet availability for APSU students.
- 2.7. Support Gobs Give Back and other charitable foundations supporting internet accessibility and overcoming technological issues for students.
- 2.8. Support Student Health Services in transition planning from in-person visits to virtual health care.

Focused Review Leaving Campus

On March 23, all buildings were locked, and signs were placed on doors announcing that the campus was operating in a virtual work environment. Almost 100 essential employees remained on campus each day to ensure that the physical plant was safe and secure.

To de-densify campus, the University postponed or canceled large events that are fundamental to Austin Peay's culture. The 36th Annual Candlelight Ball was canceled, and the spring commencement ceremonies were postponed. The loss of these two events, along with several others, had a negative emotional impact on the community.

By March 31, 200 students indicated they would stay in residence halls, and 181 did not respond to requests to move out. TF meetings included daily updates from Joe Mills, Director of Housing and Dining.

Observations 3

Survey Question:

Moving students off campus presented a challenge. By March 31, 200 students indicated that they would stay in the dorms and 181 that did not respond to requests to move out. Please discuss the TF involvement in decisions around dorm closings.

- “The task force knew there would be some people who had nowhere to go. This is a renter relationship, and you cannot simply kick people out. Some universities did this, and the students were very angry. I think the task force helped Joe Mills think through student issues and helped him produce quarantine rooms, food delivery to students, and adapt and learn how to serve these students.”
- “Counseling Services paid close attention to this and scrambled to increase contact with RA's and develop resources for those students staying on campus.”

Again, it is easy to look back and critique what happened months ago, but we have to look through a lens of what we knew at the time. By removing uncertainty, and providing a clear path ahead, we helped restore some normalcy to the times.

-Task Force Member

- “I believe the Task Force waited an appropriate amount of time to make this decision. Other institutions made this decision hastily and had major backlash. The decision to give students the option to stay, if necessary, protected some students who otherwise had nowhere else to go.”
- “I think the TF spent a lot of time figuring out the dorm situation and I think they did that well. As someone who really doesn’t have much involvement, if any, with the dorms, the discussions I saw as an outsider were thorough and candid. The communication I saw after the TF discussions were accurate and representative. I think in those discussions we learned that it’s always best to include faculty and staff on any student communication. If anything needed to be improved, that was it. Overall, I think, from my outsider perspective- that was handled pretty well by Joe and his team.”

This is a renter relationship and you cannot simply kick people out. Some universities did this and the students were very angry.

-Task Force Member

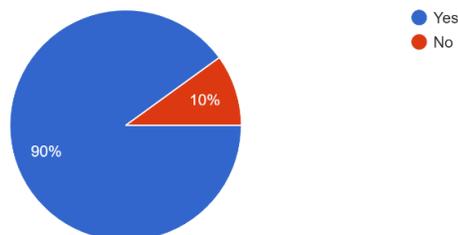
Analysis and Findings 3

On March 17, Joe Mills and the Dining and Housing Team recommended a plan to the TF. The reduced resident plan encouraged students to move out and return home by March 28. Under this plan, any student who could not go home could stay until May 8-9. Mills recommended crediting housing fees back to students’ accounts. About 250 students remained on campus, and more than 150 used the cafeteria. The University’s Chick-Fil-A site remained open.

With most students off campus, refunds and financial responsibility were discussed at length in TF meetings.

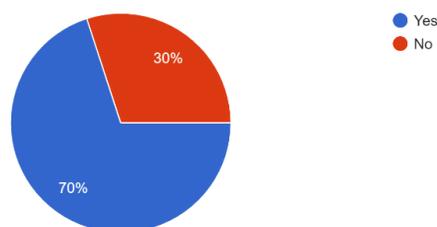
Were there discussions at the Task Force level about refunds for any student fees? (Housing, dining, online course fees, etc..)

10 responses



Did the Task Force come to general consensus about those fee or financial refunds, in your opinion?

10 responses



On March 20, The Office of Information Technology (OIT) was nearly overwhelmed supporting all faculty, staff, students, and administration pivoting to off-campus work. “The Office of Information Technology is making every effort to address the significant increase in Help Ticket requests as swiftly as possible as we all work to move instruction online and support telecommuting faculty and staff. Please note that we rely significantly on student employees for first-level support. We are extremely appreciative of our student employees, but we are currently operating with minimal student support,” David Sanchez, associate vice president and chief information officer, said in an email to faculty and staff.

This was a critical support to students, and a challenge for departments relying upon student work.

On March 18, student employees – a vital campus subgroup – learned they would be paid for the rest of the semester. Scholarship students were told they did not need to return to their positions; they would not lose their scholarships. This provided critical support to students but a challenge to departments relying on student work. Currently, OIT has 29 staff members to support all IT and network needs for Austin Peay. They also manage the campus switchboard and IT Help Desk. The campus switchboard and IT Help Desk were significantly impacted by the loss of workers. As a result of conversations and cooperation during TF meetings, employees from across campus who were unable to work remotely were able to shift responsibilities to support the switchboard operations for the duration of the Work From Home (WFH) timeframe.

Survey Question:

As confirmed positive cases were identified on campus in late March 2020, did you feel confident about the TF recommendations to the SLT and response to COVID-19? This is your feelings only – not a judgement on the work completed or in progress.

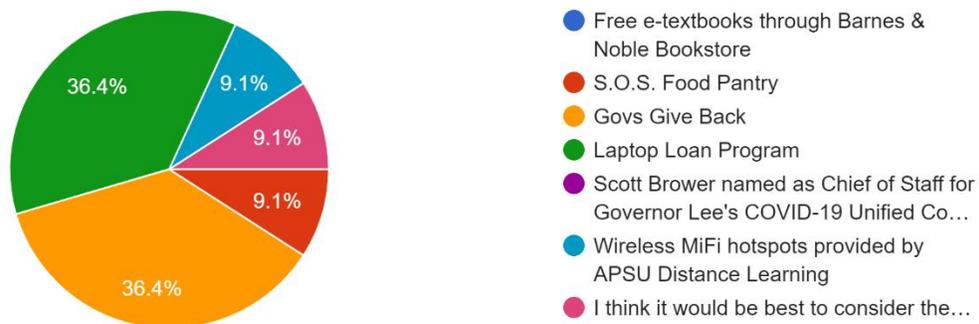
- “There was a disturbing lack of faculty representation on the taskforce. I think it would have been beneficial that specific statements or information that went to SLT would have been formally adopted in writing or perhaps in the form of a motion so that follow-up could be easily determined... SLT accepted the recommendation of X or SLT did not accept the recommendation of Y due to these concerns. Overall, I think it worked but there is some room for improvement to close the loop on information back to the committee from the SLT.”
- “We didn’t have too many cases in March on campus and it seemed a much easier workload to manage than we have now. In a way, because it was so easy, I find that we are struggling more now that the confirmed cases are so close to home.”

With the rapid de-densification of campus, there were few opportunities to “feel good” about the work being done. Headlines from the March 30 New York Times reflect the general mood of the nation: “Trump Extends Social Distancing Guidelines Through End of April,” “The U.S. Tried to Build a New Fleet of Ventilators. The Mission Failed,” and “The Psychological Trauma That Awaits Our Doctors and Nurses.” (www.nytimes.com)

Survey Question:

Part of leaving campus involved caring for those with significant unmet needs. To that end, Austin Peay rose to the occasion. If you could only pick...fort makes you most proud of the APSU community?

11 responses



Recommendations 3

- 3.1 Continue transparent discussion around residential density and communicate decisions clearly to students living on campus.
- 3.2 Continue to discuss dining operations with contracted services to reduce costs and fulfill contract requirements.
- 3.3 As early as possible, discuss financial refunds and fees and the impacts on *both* the institution and students.
- 3.4 Support student employees and departments navigating the potential loss of workers. Build this into COOP planning for each department.
- 3.5 Formalize the Recommendations and Report-Back process with SLT.

Focused Review Working and Learning from Home

April, May and June 2020 were spent in the living room instead of the classroom. The initial challenges of moving people off campus were over, but the challenges long-term operations were just beginning. At the time, the country was in a “wait and see” holding pattern. Austin Peay responded with daily TF meetings on Teams and regular meetings of the SLT. All but one respondents of the survey believed that the TF daily meetings needed.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA or Act) requires certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. These provisions applied from April 1, 2020, through Dec. 31, 2020. An Austin Peay employee may use the leave if they are unable to work, including unable to telework, on April 1, 2020. The paid entitlements for each reason was shared with the TF. Then-APSU President Alisa White decided to pay 100% of an employee’s regular rate of pay for all emergency paid sick leave and expanded Family and Medical Leave due to COVID-19 instead of the two-thirds identified in the Act.

Observations 4

Survey Question:

To the best you can recall, what was the largest challenge the TF faced during the month of April?

- “Trying to predict and anticipate the future.”
- “Conflict arose between the task force guidance and the SPIT project. Both groups were working on the same task of opening for Fall. Duplication of work. Some daily meetings went down too many rabbit holes that should have been assigned to committee teams to discuss then report back. With 30-40+ people in a meeting, too many voices that went off topic too many times.”
- “Attending to student, faculty, and staff mental health.”
- “The decision and work that went into giving refunds for housing/dining in April was huge.”
- “The month of April was concerned with looking forward to Summer and Fall Return to campus. This was the beginnings of the masking policy, potential testing scenarios, plans for Fall housing, etc. There was a lot of work about the CARES Act and refunds to students. The refunds and CARES Act processing were a significant part of discussions.”

Survey Question:

HR was bombarded by questions and concerns during this process. What were your major HR concerns during April 2020?

- “HR staff becoming fatigued and burned out. They are a small group compared to our peer institutions.”
- “HR did not enforce the need for individuals to speak with their supervisors. If supervisors failed to do their job, then their supervisors should have become involved. HR exacerbated the situation by allowing individuals to continuously contact them for information instead of using the chain of command (which is broken in many cases). Communication all but stopped when meetings stopped.”

With Microsoft teams in place, my office checked in/out so everyone knew who was available if needed. We had daily updates for 10, 20, 50 minutes depending upon the needs of the day. We summarized the day's events we each had to see any patterns or issues that needed cross-communication. This worked so well, we plan to implement something similar now that we are back.

-Task Force Member

- “I always felt supported by HR and honestly did not have too many concerns from them. I think this was because I was on the TF committee and could hear Sheraine's [Gilliam-Holmes] perspective and how she felt about things. I knew she was an ally in making sure we kept our employees safe.”
- “Limited EAP resources and counselors.”

Survey Question:

As online learning became the new normal...name one unintended positive consequence.

- “It put the responsibility for using the learning resources on the student. If you create all the content, materials, and support them with office hours the student still must take an active role in their education. There is not simply ‘sitting’ in class. It was a more active process, and many students learned a lot about how to study as much as just actually studying.”

- “I’m not sure of an unintended consequence, but one that was probably intended and met was that we did it! Faculty adapted. Staff supported. And our students progressed. That is no small feat, and we should feel proud that this was accomplished.”
- “I believe the online learning pushed students and faculty to embrace technology like never before. As the webmaster, I encounter people who are afraid to dive in, but this forced people to move forward in that regard.”

Survey Question:

As online learning became the new normal...name one unintended negative consequence.

- “Some students didn’t have enough time to work through the courses before COVID-19 and now with more responsibilities at home (such as kids) they really were pressed for time and could not handle the work as they were over extended. This led to some students just choosing not to do some of the work and take the penalty to get a Pass instead of working for mastery of the subject.”
- “Again, not sure if this was unintended, but the most frustrating issue for me is that once a decision is made, the complaining that takes place from those that didn’t get their way. There was no easy decision here, but the willingness of some to complain because something in their job changed was disturbing. No one asked for this and it was a matter of dealing with it. Most people were part of the solution. A small percentage chose to add to the problem.”
- “There are tremendous disparities in equity in our student population. Students didn’t have internet, they didn’t have laptops, and they didn’t have cars to get to places that could offer them the services they need. These issues have always been present for several students and the move to completely online and the shutting down of many support structures made it that much harder for those students.”

Analysis and Findings 4

Soon after campus moved fully online, deans and department chairs were invited to participate in the daily TF Teams calls. This was in direct response to concerns that faculty voices were not included in decision making conversations.

Surveys were sent to faculty, staff and students in late April to gauge the University’s response to COVID-19. There were 287 responses among exempt and non-exempt, non-instructional staff. Some 1,157 students and 340 instructional faculty responded to the April 23 survey.

Concurrently, there was a survey sent out by the COVID Academic Subcommittee to solicit faculty input in preparation for the anticipated Fall 2020 semester return. This survey explored potential academic, disciplinary or accreditation challenges. There were 227 responses from faculty. (Appendix G)

The Higher Education Data Service Consortium (HEDS) Survey (Staff Survey, Appendix F), written by Dr. Andrew Luna, collected information from many institutions for a widespread assessment of the COVID-19 response nationally. The APSU survey found that:

- Staff were very satisfied with the way the APSU senior administrators communicated how COVID-19 would affect the campus and its employees. They were also satisfied at the care and support shown to them by the senior administration.
- Staff were very satisfied with the way that their immediate supervisor communicated how COVID-19 would affect the campus, their area, as well as the employees within. They were also satisfied at the care, support, and understanding shown to them by their immediate supervisor.
- Staff were satisfied at how quickly the administration responded to the COVID-19 crisis by encouraging telecommuting even though some staff were concerned about their technological abilities or how a remote, isolated environment would be effective.
- During the COVID-19 crisis, exempt employees expressed a significantly higher level of stress concerning the amount of work they do and increased deadline pressures.
- Staff, in general, tend to be worried about how COVID-19 will impact enrollment, budgets, and their jobs. Many staff demonstrate at least some concern about keeping their jobs.

The HEDS Survey (Student Survey, Appendix G) was written and compiled by Dr. Andrew Luna, Dr. Amanda Wornhoff and Dr. Tammy Bryant for Austin Peay State University. HEDS collects survey information from many institutions for a widespread assessment of the COVID-19 response nationally. The APSU survey found that:

- Students were appreciative of APSU's communication efforts to help them keep up to date with the COVID-19 changes as well as with their personal and academic wellbeing.
- Students believed that APSU's decision to move to the online-only environment was quick and in the student's best interest.
- Most students indicated that, while they understood the need to move to the online-only environment, they did not care for it.
- Many of the students believed they lost interaction and connection to the APSU community during the changes brought on by COVID-19.
- While students were appreciative of faculty, many students believe that some faculty were better than others in delivering material in the online-only environment. Students commented that some faculty needed better training in teaching classes online and that online curriculum needed to be coordinated more.
- Freshmen and sophomores indicated a higher level of concern and worry overall than juniors, seniors, and graduate students.

The HEDS Survey (Faculty Survey, Appendix H), written by Dr. Andrew Luna, collected information from many institutions for a widespread assessment of the COVID-19 response nationally. The APSU survey found that:

- Faculty were very satisfied with the way that APSU senior administrators communicated how COVID-19 would affect the campus and its employees. They were also satisfied at the care and support shown to them by the senior administration.
- Faculty were very satisfied with the way that the institution helped them transition to an online-only environment.

- Faculty were satisfied at how quickly the administration responded to the COVID-19 crisis by encouraging telecommuting even though some faculty were concerned about how effective some of their hands-on classes would be in an online environment.
- In general, lecturers/instructors indicated a significantly lower level of stress and concern than professors, associate professors, or assistant professors.
- Within the online-only environment, faculty tended to use D2L, Zoom, instructor-created video, and discussion boards as their main teaching methods.
- In general, faculty believe many students were not disciplined or prepared for an online-only environment, citing participation issues, distraction problems, and technology capabilities.
- For the most part, faculty indicated a concern for students, faculty, and other staff as well as their family and friends. A concern among them is opening the campus too soon, followed by a resurgence of the virus.

I think all of the decisions weighed heavily on me. I was not a lead decision-maker, but I certainly felt the anxiety and pressure to help make the right decisions for the University as a whole.
-Task Force Member

For the TF, the most concerning information from the survey was “46% of respondents indicated that they often or very often worried about the health and wellbeing of colleagues.”

The TF was concerned for the mental and physical wellbeing of coworkers and covering essential functions of Austin Peay, while also balancing the varied needs of a diverse student population. With only a few hundred students living on campus and about 100 staff supporting the physical infrastructure, the attention shifted to HR to develop a return-to-campus plan.

Some administrative directives caused a duplication of efforts and confused objectives. The Strategic Planning Integration Team (SPIT) was charged with examining how the University could successfully maintain operations during future disruptive events. SPIT was to provide a framework for University operations for the next 6-24 months (beginning June 2020). In Emergency Management parlance, this is a “next operational period” planning team. Similarly, the TF was directed “to help the University make plans to mitigate the effects of a potential spread of the coronavirus that could impact our students, faculty, and staff.” Confusion arose when the TF and the SPIT teams came to different conclusions or put forth different solutions to different issues. Disagreement among the groups and duplication of efforts resulted in people attending multiple meetings a day to discuss similar ideas and solutions without clear expectations of completion of efforts.

Recommendations 4

- 4.1. Support IT in long term Continuity of Operations.
 - 4.1.1. Upgrade and support shortcomings and challenges as they arise with needed hardware, software licensing, connectivity, phones, staffing shortages, etc.
- 4.2. Consider having a MD on the TF and in discussions when responding to a pandemic.

- 4.3. Clearly define TF and Working Group accountable objectives. Consider following FEMA Incident Command Structure (ICS) operational and planning structure for any rapidly developing and expanding incident.
 - 4.3.1. Add FEMA ICS structure to all hazard planning for APSU.
 - 4.3.2. Training and support for FEMA ICS development
- 4.4. Expand support to HR for long term dynamic crises that require working from home.
- 4.5. Create open dialogue between TF and SLT to discuss why proposals were approved or denied. "I think the real issue is that there were never any hard and fast pivot points that were directly established that were evidence-based approaches to decision-making. There were many proposals given to the SLT but almost no consideration by the SLT to explain the rationale of these decisions to the taskforce. This provided the appearance of one-way communications." Task Force Member.

Focused Review Return to...Normal?

On May 29, the TF presented the SLT with a draft of a phased return-to-work plan, focusing on the health and safety of all APSU employees and students. The SLT approved the plan with the stipulation that things may shift as more is known about the new coronavirus.

Observations 5

Survey Question:

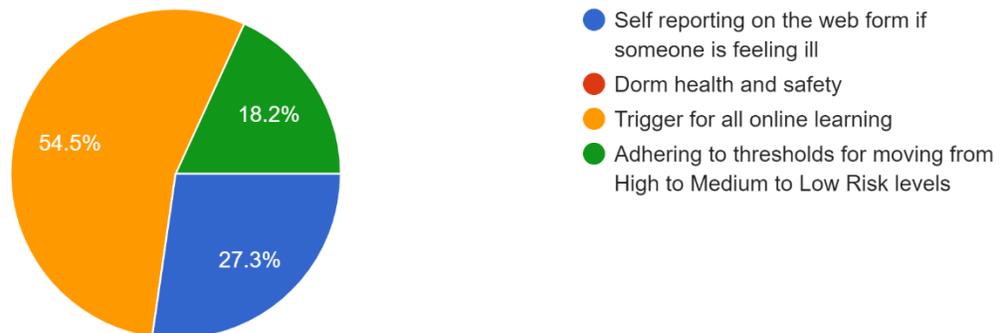
Once the recommendations to the SLT were delivered, what was your TOP concern for your division or department?

- "COMMUNICATION!!!! We are not dedicating enough effort to communicate either internally or externally with all interested parties. That became evident during the internal tabletop exercise conducted last week. Various members of the staff and faculty remained unclear as to standards, expectations, and processes. That is exactly why the exercise took place, but now action must follow to correct the friction points and gaps."
- "General guidelines and face mask policy."
- "Safety of staff."

Survey Question:

The baton has been passed from the COVID-19 Task Force to the Recovery Work Group to fill the gaps and troubleshoot new issues with reopenin...concern do you have as we welcome people back?

11 responses



Analysis and Findings 5

The University began a phased return-to-work process on June 15, with the goal of welcoming all employees back to campus by Aug. 15. HR and each college hosted online town halls to address questions and concerns about the new campus environment. HR held eight online employee trainings, with 1,025 staff attending.

The final TF meeting occurred on June 5. A COVID Recovery Work Group (WG) was developed and they began meeting on June 15 to operationalize the recommendations of the TF. The efforts of the WG will not be examined in this After Action Report.

On June 30, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) hosted a tabletop exercise (TTX) for Austin Peay State University to identify gaps in its planning and response to the pandemic. Lt. Gen. Ronald Bailey (retired), vice president for external affairs, hosted five additional exercises through mid-August for APSU decision makers and local partners.

Recommendations 5

- 5.1. Build the TTX model into future decision-making efforts.
- 5.2. Plan and execute frequent and consistent interaction between HR and staff in formats that are accessible to all.
- 5.3. Plan and execute frequent and consistent interaction between provost/college deans and students in formats that are accessible to all.
- 5.4. Pay attention to 'burn out' among decision makers in extended operational period incidents. Ending the TF and turning the operational duties to the WG protected key decision makers from the minutiae of making the recommendations a reality.