



VCU

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VCU's Phased Return to Campus Plan

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COVID-19 communications planning

- Virginia Commonwealth University deployed the following communications strategy to effectively keep the VCU community up-to-date on COVID-19 and reopening plans.
- VCU's messaging principles include clear, consistent, timely, transparent and relevant communications that address the needs and concerns of all community members.
- Communications are managed per VCU emergency protocol: universitywide, high-level messages developed and coordinated by University Relations with units contributing information specific to their audiences. Return messaging and communications assets are established at the university level, with units customizing for their appropriate use.
- The VCU Incident Command Team Executive Committee approves universitywide messages.

COVID-19 communications planning

Teleworking began for the VCU campus starting in mid-March after growing concern about the spread of COVID-19. Students left campus for spring break and were ordered not to return (except in certain cases). Communications needed to quickly address disseminating information to the 50,000-person campus.

Reactive tactics:

- COVID-19 blog, which eventually became a fully fledged website after crashing in its first night
- Mass emails/community messages
 - Executive and leadership messages
 - Weekly newsletter
- Generic email account: COVID-19@vcu.edu for general inquiries
- Media relations
- One VCU branding
- #OneVCU videos, photos and social media campaign
- VCU mobile app notifications

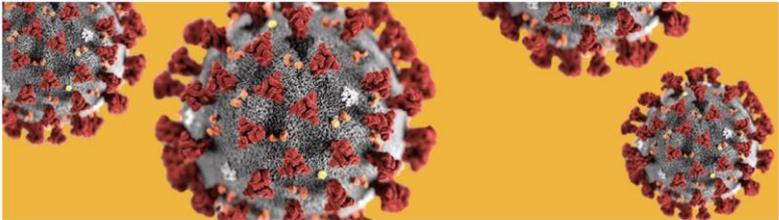
COVID-19 communications planning

COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Latest updates

- Academics
- Operations
- Events
- Travel
- Staying well
- Resources

Latest updates



Community messages

For questions about the impact of COVID-19 on VCU and VCU Health, please email covid-19@vcu.edu.

COVID-19 is a rapidly changing situation. Your well-being is our top priority. Together with VCU Health, we are working around the clock to take proactive steps to ensure the health and safety of our students, patients, faculty and staff.

In this unprecedented time, your Ram family is pulling together to answer your question directly and often through your VCU email as well as VCU Facebook and Twitter. Contact questions at covid-19@vcu.edu. We will continue to update this site throughout the day.



The university and health system have risen as One VCU to meet the extraordinary challenges the COVID-19 crisis presents. You all have shown great adaptability and perseverance, continuing our mission to save lives, to educate and to learn. This weekly update, arriving each Friday through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, provides you with the latest decisions, resources, opportunities and good news. All updates are available at covid-19.vcu.edu. Receive VCU COVID-19 notifications by downloading [VCU Mobile](#) from your iOS or Android app store.

COVID-19 internal communications

VCU has a network of approximately 180 communications professionals. Regular communications to employee resource groups, the Strategic Communications Council (SCC) and Communications Career Community, were pivotal in successfully navigating the early spring in the midst of COVID-19.

IC initiatives:

- Google group of SCC members to share information and updates
- Regular messages from central communications detailing updates to COVID-19 website
- Regular messages from central communications detailing forthcoming leadership decisions and messages
- SBARs/backgrounders on relevant issues and points of contact for media relations
- Schools and departments encouraged to create their own specialized COVID-19 sites and pages
- Schools and departments encouraged to submit content for weekly newsletter
- Regular coordination with VCU Health communications staff

COVID-19 response team

In response to COVID-19 pandemic, VCU identified a response coordinator and deployed an Incident Coordinator Team (ICT) consisting of university and health system leadership as well as health, safety and science experts. The team and its various subcommittees meet regularly. The ICT allows for a collaborative and coordinated response and a decision-making structure to plan and address pressing needs.

ICT subcommittees:

- **Communications and Government Relations**
- VCU Health System Advisors
- Safety and Health
- Faculty and Staff HR, Employee Health Team
- Research and Animals
- Institutional Equity
- Academic Affairs Teams

Pivoting to return operations

After the end of the semester, leadership began focusing on a phased return for the fall 2020 semester. Among the items developed, included:

- Guiding principles:
 - Follow CDC, state and VCU Health System guidance
 - Evaluate and implement PPE, supplies, policies, procedures, education, screening, tracing and testing protocols
 - *Physical* distancing
 - Clean and sanitize facilities in line with CDC guidelines
 - Flexibility and accommodations
 - Flexibility to address new situations, including waves of COVID-19 and changes in guidance
 - Monitor health of the community and respond to increases in infection rates
- Community responsibilities (training, staffing plans, safe behaviors, etc.)
- Public health efforts (testing, reporting and response) developed
- Subcommittees submitted reports on their preliminary plans for on-campus operations (course formats, student services, facilities, etc.)

Pivoting to return communications



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKpb2luT9Xk&feature=youtu.be&start=4&end=55&version=3>

Pivoting to return communications

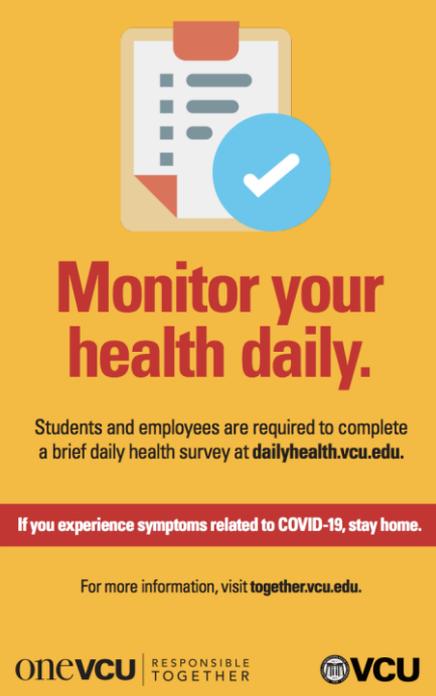
Communications goals:

- Build trust and engagement of students, faculty and staff in determining the priorities of a safe return to campus
- Manage expectations: create an understanding and awareness among the university community that we are returning to a “new normal.” Living with COVID will be different than before COVID
- Raise awareness leading to action, acceptance and advocacy of our students, faculty and staff to adhere to safety measures
 - Create acceptance and buy-in that we are all in this together to keep ourselves and each other safe. Each of us is responsible to do what is necessary to keep our community safe and enable us to achieve our academic, research and health care goals

Pivoting to return communications

Preliminary return-to-campus tactics:

- Research
 - Reviewing state, university and organizational reopening plans from around the country
- Key messages
- Branding for return - One VCU: Responsible Together
- New [Together website](#) and web content strategy
 - Homepage
- Mass emails/community messages
 - Executive and leadership messages
 - Weekly newsletter
- Generic email account: together@vcu.edu for general inquiries
- University planning documents
- Return video and photography
- Social media content creation, monitoring
- Physical and digital signage
- Shutdown strategy



Monitor your health daily.

Students and employees are required to complete a brief daily health survey at dailyhealth.vcu.edu.

If you experience symptoms related to COVID-19, stay home.

For more information, visit together.vcu.edu.

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Return communications in progress

Institutional:

- Townhalls and information sessions
 - FAQs = more than 1000 questions received this week alone between three townhall sessions
- Reminders training requirements and other protocols
- Testing details
- Considerations around campus closure

Marketing:

- Videography and photography
 - navigating instructional spaces
 - healthy behaviors
- Auditing need for additional materials



VCU Families

July 20 at 1:22 PM · 🌐

Students and families are invited to an information session on July 21 at 1 p.m. An information session for students and families regarding fall 2020 will be held virtually on Tuesday, July 21 at 1 p.m. You can register at https://vcu.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_zTIN3cZxQ4y85Npp-zGolQ.

We'll continue to provide information and resources throughout the remainder of the summer and fall. Please continue to check your VCU email for updates and the One VCU: Responsible Together website, which is also available in mobile format via the VCU Mobile app. For more information and additional details about course modality please review the email sent to students at <https://together.vcu.edu/news/july-15-academic-updates-for-students/>.



VCU.ZOOM.US

Welcome! You are invited to join a webinar: Fall 2020 Information Session f...

Welcome! You are invited to join a webinar: Fall 2020 Information Session for VCU students and

Return internal communications

IC initiatives (recent and in-progress):

- Communications strategy distributed to all university comms pros
 - Approval of unit-level return communications by central communications office
- Workgroup with regular meetings to implement decisions from ICT subcommittee
- Integrating SCC and other comms pros in efforts
 - Assessing needs and developing IC toolkit (FAQs, cataloguing VCU return websites and other resources)
- Regular messages from central communications detailing forthcoming leadership decisions and messages
 - Coordinating timing of leadership messages
- SBARs/backgrounders on relevant issues and points of contact for media relations
- Schools and departments to create their own specialized return sites and pages
- Schools and departments to submit content for weekly newsletter
- Regular coordination with VCU Health System communications staff

General IC tips on returning to the workplace

- **Brand your efforts.**
- **Develop guiding principles, messaging principles and key messages.** Use these consistently.
- **Understand your audiences** and what they need. Address how to communicate with more complex audiences.
- **Reach out** to comms counterparts and key partners and understand roles/responsibilities. 
- **Avoid jargon** and communicate **how and why** decisions are made wherever possible.
- **Balance** operational comms with positive, encouraging content and/or programming.
- **Manage expectations.** It's okay to not know all the details, but communicate that.
- When you're ready, **get into the weeds.** Provide people with the details they need to navigate their "new normal."
- **Diversify your channels** and **evaluate efforts.**
- **Show appreciation.**
- **Be proactive** with your strategy, processes and protocols as much as possible.
- **Get ready for crises within the crisis.** Anything can happen.

Questions?

Feel free to reach out on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rainafields/> or email: fieldsrl@vcu.edu