

COVID 19 Health and Safety Ethical Challenges in Academia

L. Faye Grimsley, PhD, CIH, FAIHA

Associate Professor and Head, Public Health Sciences

Xavier University of Louisiana

Clinical Associate Professor -Tulane University SPHTM

COVID 19 Occupational Health Ethics Considerations

- ▶ What guidance and processes are needed for decision making during altered standards of care and practices and allocation of scarce resources.
- ▶ Non-routine circumstances.
- ▶ What are the best standards of practice to protect the largest number of students, faculty, and staff.

COVID 19 Occupational Health Campus Issues

- ▶ How to return to campuses without encountering adverse health effects
- ▶ Policies for dealing with the pandemic differ by institutions and local state, and federal guidance and laws
- ▶ Resource allocation and several related ethical challenges

Health and Safety Impacts of COVID 19 on University Campuses

- ▶ Limited resources for some campuses (community colleges, small colleges, minority serving institutions (MSI), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)).
- ▶ Extensive plans to guard against a spread of the coronavirus on other campuses.
- ▶ Some campuses can afford to spend millions of dollars to try to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

COVID 19 Health and Safety Inequity Impacts on Colleges and Universities

- ▶ Students were sent home
- ▶ Loss of room and board fees
- ▶ Switching to online learning brought additional costs for colleges
- ▶ HBCUs and smaller colleges generally have smaller endowments that can be used as a financial buffer

Example Return to Campus Components

- ▶ A testing and tracing management plan;
- ▶ Changes to physical spaces;
- ▶ Frequent and ongoing cleaning in general spaces and residence halls;
- ▶ Travel restrictions;
- ▶ Event and gathering restrictions;
- ▶ Changes to policies around residence halls;
- ▶ Emphasis on personal behavior related to masks, social distancing and hand hygiene;
- ▶ Changes to the academic calendar and teaching modalities

Example University Asymptomatic Re-opening Protocol Limited Resources

- ▶ Students are being asked to take a COVID-19 test within the seven days prior to reporting to campus.
- ▶ Those test results are to be submitted via email, fax or upload through a patient portal website.

Controlled Asymptomatic Testing More Resources

- ▶ Before being allowed to move into their campus residences, students received a negative COVID-19 test at an arrival center, located in a selected off-campus hotel location.
- ▶ Faculty, staff and off-campus students were also tested at special centers located on school campuses before returning to the classroom or office.

Thinking Through Ethical Dilemmas

- ▶ What is ethically acceptable
- ▶ Ensure fair and consistent practices while providing enough flexibility to respond to challenges unique to your location
- ▶ Develop a framework for ethical operations
- ▶ One size may not fit all, modify as needed

Challenges and COVID 19

- ▶ Less specialized trained faculty (e.g., epidemiologists)
- ▶ Less ability to conduct in house testing
- ▶ Limited resources for type of data collected and analyses
- ▶ The reality of the disproportionate burden of some pandemics (like COVID-19) on minorities creates particular challenges that have to be considered.

Louisiana COVID -19 Health Equity Task Force

- ▶ Charge
- ▶ To provide recommendations relative to health inequities which are affecting communities that are most impacted by the coronavirus.
- ▶ The task force will examine opportunities which provide greater access to high quality medical care and improve health outcomes.

Louisiana COVID- 19 Health Equity Task Force

- ▶ Goals/Outcomes
- ▶ Provide reliable and data driven information on COVID-19 safety and prevention;
- ▶ Provide the medical community with best practices and protocols for treating communities with underlying medical conditions and health disparities; and
- ▶ Ensure testing availability and ease of access for all communities.