

*Letter to the UConn Community from President Thomas Katsouleas, 5/7/20*

I wanted to follow up on a press conference called by the Governor on Wednesday regarding the criteria for the planned phased return of colleges and universities in Connecticut over the next few months. The press conference was held to release the report of the education committee of the governor's Reopen Connecticut Advisory Group, of which UConn was part. [You can see the report here.](#)

The report lays out “gating conditions” for resuming operations as well as a possible timeline for resuming various functions. I want to emphasize that these are goals, not decisions, and that the decision to return will be determined as we know more about the state of the virus and the tools we have to address it. For example, the availability of broad testing is one of the tools mentioned in the report, and is one of many important criteria we look to when we are making choices about the fall.

June 30 remains our goal date to convey a decision regarding our approach to the upcoming semester.

Various parts of the report that we already are, and have been working toward, include:

- The phased reopening of research beginning on May 20. The [Office of the Vice President for Research shared a well-developed plan and instructions to researchers](#) that we will continue to follow as we open research as quickly and as safely as we can.
- Bringing back limited numbers of non-residential students beginning in June for specific purposes such as completing needed labs. Obviously this would require discussion and careful planning involving deans, faculty and relevant staff before being undertaken.
- Re-populating as we near Sept. 1. This is the goal toward which our administrative teams are working. These teams and leaders are from the academic areas, led by the Provost; Student Affairs, led by Dean of Students; Research, led by the Vice President for Research; plus teams in other areas including Human Resources, Environmental Health and Safety, Facilities Operations, Information Technology Services, Planning, Design and Construction, and Athletics among others.

Critical issues for a safe return include reconfiguring physical spaces, traffic patterns, cleaning protocols, classroom scheduling, manager and employee expectations, etc., to ensure public health guidelines are followed in the interests of public health. We are also making plans to engage scholars and students this summer in brainstorming exercises around evidence-based approaches to limiting community spread of pathogens while enabling students to have the social and academic experiences they value.

I have asked Human Resources to send a communication to our workforce giving detailed guidance to employees and managers regarding the ramp-up of research, continued telecommuting after May 20, and other related issues. A separate message will be sent to UConn Health employees.

Our goal is to fully resume operations in the fall, and we are planning for this. However, if public health circumstances do not allow for this or if the state or the university are unable to meet the criteria for reopening spelled out in yesterday's report, a more limited or scaled-back opening would be pursued.

Only time will tell, and the report stresses that institutions must remain flexible. Large research universities and other major institutions are not generally known for their nimbleness, but UConn has already shown we are capable of being exceptionally nimble – moving to 100% online instruction in a matter of days this spring. And we will continue to be.

I hope this answers some of your questions. We will be having some targeted as well as a general town hall meetings to answer questions about the design and approach to returning.