

Weekly Update: Week of May 26, 2020

Every crisis is an opportunity to learn and adapt. Many are asking questions similar to the following in regards to Higher Ed:

- What are we learning during these challenging times?
- What will things look like post-COVID-19?
- Is college still a good investment?
- Will schools like The College of Idaho successfully navigate through this sea of change?

These are certainly questions many of us are asking ourselves. One simple answer for you: We are bullish on the future at the College, despite the near-term financial squeeze unavoidably placed on almost all colleges and universities. Let us give you some reasons for this optimism.

Despite Higher Ed being justifiably criticized for its glacial pace of change, the College has shown that it can pivot on a dime. Here are just a few examples:

In a matter of days, both students and faculty moved successfully to an online/distance learning platform. We are eager for the return to in-person instruction, but we are much more proficient and skilled with education-delivery tools than ever before, and will continue to use these going forward.

We've changed the academic calendar for the fall. What normally would have taken several years and dozens of meetings, was completed in a matter of weeks. We will start a week early (classes to begin on August 19) and finish finals before Thanksgiving.

We have found creative ways to do more with less. The rise in the cost of education has far outpaced the increase in median income. Education is the key to moving into the middle class. Higher Ed must become more affordable to those who will benefit the most. Remember, The College of Idaho was ranked No. 4 in the entire country and best in the west (U.S. News & World Report) in the new category of "Social Mobility", so we are already achieving greater results than almost any other school, but we must continue to bring the cost of attendance down.

These are a few examples where the College has produced cost-savings:

Fundraising - By engaging faculty, staff, students, and especially volunteers, we have raised 73% more through the Scholarship Gala and on Give Day than we did two years ago despite having two fewer FTE staff in the Development Office. We have less than half the FTE's of our peer institutions. For our new modular dorms, Board of Trustee member Jim Mertz volunteered his time and raised more than \$1.3 million for the project in gifts and promissory notes.

Virtual Commencement and A Coyote a Day videos - Two separate committees of students, with support from Joe Hughes and our lean marketing team, pulled off these two new projects in spectacular fashion. Virtual Commencement was a huge undertaking and we could not have succeeded without the leadership of the students and staff who planned it. If you did not watch it, it was remarkable and more personal and student-focused than the live events. Senior student Hannah DalSoglio and a team of seven other students put this together. The video event was so well-received, we must utilize elements of this virtual presentation as part of future live events. It is a win/win for the College and its students, as the students gain real-life skills in project management, supervision, collaboration, creative thinking, marketing, and executing a plan. Joe Hughes estimates that outsourcing this video project to do what

the students did as volunteers would have cost the College over \$40k. Students would not have had the same pride of ownership they had with this event either. The full video can be [found here](#).

Here is what Hannah DalSoglio (at the Scholarship Gala this year, Hannah was our student speaker, she was in the first group of Bob Miller interns at Albertsons, and began working part-time at Albertsons last semester before going full-time upon graduation) has to say about the experience of leading this effort. “When I was first asked to head up the committee to put together our virtual commencement I really wasn’t sure how the whole thing would go. I had anticipated that was a job for people in the administration, someone with more decision-making power and experience than I had, but the Co-Presidents and Marketing and Communications department were certain they wanted the event created with the students in mind, and there was no better way to do that than having as many senior students as possible on the team. I was nervous and excited to put it together. I knew I had a good team, and I had some experience with projects that involved a lot of people, but never something as large in scale nor as important to the community. I started off the only way I knew how – with a spreadsheet – and from there, learned a lot of lessons about not just working with a team on a big project, but also working with a team who is more than socially distant and can really only communicate via video chats and frequent emails. By the end of the project, we had created something that, as a team, we could be proud of, and once we saw the positive reaction from everyone else in the community, I felt really great about what we put together. Now, as I begin my career, I can take the lessons I learned about project management in my classes and through my high-impact practices, like working with the virtual commencement team. It meant the world to me to be able to help put this together for my YoteFam and I got to learn a lot along the way as well.”

Senior Ashlyn Pistey led the “Coyote a Day” project which produced 53 videos over the two months after students shifted to online learning. She would also tell you this was an unforgettable high-impact experience.

This summer our students staying on campus will be engaged in jobs ranging from painting, landscaping, deep-cleaning, and readying new large spaces for fall classrooms to allow for physical distancing. They will engage in projects to begin connecting with all of our incoming class, building relationships and establishing a sense of community before the students arrive in August. They will continue to work with our marketing team producing videos and serving as ambassadors. We have always had students work on campus, but we will grow this program throughout the year, giving students great work experiences while helping to lower costs. Our overall goal is that someday, all students can graduate from The College of Idaho without debt.

Many of these changes and goals have been in our overall, long-term plans. But the challenges of COVID-19 have given us the opportunity to accelerate the pace of implementation. With change comes the ability to grow and utilize resources that become the new framework in moving forward.

We will have more on the great work of our COVID-19 Task Forces which are working on return to in-person education in our next update, but for this week we wanted to give you a glimpse into what we see as the future of your College of Idaho.

Doug and Jim