

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kerrie Fineran, Chair  
Student Affairs Committee

TO: Steven Hanke, Chair  
Educational Policy Committee

TO: Erika Mann, Chair  
Academic Computing and Information Technology Advisory Subcommittee

FROM: Ann Marshall, Chair  
Executive Committee

DATE: November 22, 2021

SUBJ: Sharing of Report Submissions on COVID-19 Lessons with Senate Committees  
and Invitation for Recommendations

WHEREAS A request was made in fall of 2021 that units across campus share lessons and innovations during COVID-19 and that twenty-two units submitted such a report; and

WHEREAS The primary “Report on Findings” on “Documenting and Leveraging COVID-19 Lessons and Innovations” is attached as part of this Senate Reference Document; and

WHEREAS Jeff Malanson (University COVID-19 Point of Contact and Director of Strategic Planning), in conjunction with the Chancellor and Vice Chancellors, have asked the Executive Committee that the original submission reports be shared with relevant Senate Committees and that these Senate Committees be invited to offer recommendations;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Student Affairs Committee, Educational Policy Committee, and Academic Computing and Information Technology Advisory Subcommittee be provided with the original report submissions, that they review these submissions, and that these Committees are invited to offer recommendations and/or take additional action on how individuals, units, and/or the university as a whole might constructively leverage any of these lessons or innovations in the future; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that any other Senate committee, Senate subcommittee, faculty, and/or campus unit is also invited to contact Jeff Malanson to request access to the original report submissions.

## **Documenting and Leveraging COVID-19 Lessons and Innovations**

### *Report on Findings*

In October 2021, Purdue University Fort Wayne's academic and administrative units were asked to provide a brief overview of the lessons they had learned and innovations they had developed as a response to COVID-19 that they believe should be carried forward into our post-COVID operations. (See the last page for the solicitation that was shared with units.)

Reports were received from 22 units. These reports demonstrated thoughtful reflection on what had started as necessary adaptations to the pandemic-induced shutdown of in-person operations in Spring 2020 but became intentional innovations during the 2020-21 academic year to better support our students, employees, and the overall continuity and quality of university operations.

The dozens of specific lessons and innovations shared in the unit reports can be summarized in four thematic areas, as outlined below. Two additional considerations for implementing these lessons and innovations in the future are also included. There is naturally some overlap between these thematic areas, but it is important to recognize them each as distinct takeaways that impact student success and quality of place at Purdue Fort Wayne.

#### **Access**

Virtual meetings became and have largely remained standard practice since March 2020, with many units continuing to report utilization of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex, etc., as a means of remaining flexible and increasing access for both students and employees.

While [in-person classes or intentionally-designed online courses](#) are generally seen as being better for student learning and engagement than attending via Zoom or watching recorded lectures, the availability of virtual meetings with instructors and advisors, virtual programs and engagement opportunities, and virtual support services are seen as having ongoing importance in the future. Not only do students appreciate the flexibility that virtual options provide, but they improve accessibility for students with disabilities, jobs, internships, children and other family commitments, and for students who belong to vulnerable populations.

Several units specifically highlighted the importance of providing our students with resources and opportunities that are less bound by place and time—our students have needs beyond their time on campus and outside of traditional work hours that at least some units have been able to better meet as a result of pandemic innovations.

#### **Efficiency and Flexibility**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated resource constraints across Purdue Fort Wayne, most importantly with regard to money and time. Many units pursued innovations as a response to the pandemic that have led to greater efficiency with each.

- Several units converted what had previously been paper-based processes into fully electronic processes that save time for units and end users and reduce reliance on and utilization of other resources.
- The ongoing use of videoconferencing for meetings with participants outside of campus has reduced the amount of time employees spend traveling and the reimbursement of mileage

expenses; this is especially true for units and personnel that regularly meet with colleagues at Purdue University West Lafayette and Purdue University Northwest.

- The continued use of videoconferencing for meetings with on-campus participants has reduced the amount of time employees spend walking between meetings and has also generally made it easier to schedule and keep meetings as individual employees navigate working on campus or remotely.
- The flexibility for at least some employees to work from home as circumstances dictate—and especially when they are feeling under the weather—has led to people making better decisions from a wellness perspective and has resulted in less lost work time.
- Several units reported an intentional effort to engage in cross-training to ensure that necessary work can continue if an employee becomes unavailable; this is a lesson that could likely be implemented by other units across campus to good effect.
- The movement of certain trainings, both locally and across the Purdue System, to virtual environments—especially when done asynchronously—enables employees to participate in those trainings as their schedules allow rather than at pre-determined times; the use of virtual trainings and other professional development opportunities also holds the promise of increasing access to these resources.

### **Communication and Collaboration**

Several units reported very positive outcomes from their ongoing use of Microsoft Teams to support communication and collaboration both synchronously and asynchronously within their units. Many units likewise reported an increased effort to reach out to and work with other units on campus as a response to the pandemic. For example, ITS described increased collaboration with other units to better meet student and employee needs.

The Q Center specifically reports relying on Discord to build and foster a “community of care” between students who would normally rely on in-person programming. For students—especially members of vulnerable populations who do not always find necessary support structures at home or in their communities—the ability to connect to a virtual support network of peers has been essential.

In general, the pandemic has led the university to be more intentional about how we communicate critical information on campus and within the Purdue System. Our communication systems remain imperfect, but the pandemic has spurred improvements and highlighted the need for increased collaboration.

### **Teaching and Learning**

While relatively few academic departments shared insights, those that did reported impressive innovation and ingenuity in both meeting course learning objectives in virtual environments and in taking virtual engagement strategies and bringing them back into the classroom. For many faculty who taught online or relied more heavily on online tools and pedagogies during the 2020-21 academic year, it forced them to rethink core aspects of their courses and teaching in ways they had never had to previously. In multiple cases, this led to improved student learning and overall quality of experience in online and hybrid courses and has changed the ways faculty approached their return to the classroom in Fall 2021. Examples provided by the departments of Counselor and Graduate Education and Psychology include sharing critical course information through multiple modalities to ensure that students engage with and understand course expectations, and intentionally using small group engagement opportunities in face-to-face courses to build community and grow networks of support.

While generally not raised in the unit reports for this initiative, a large number of faculty across the university have shared in other venues an increasing utilization of Zoom, Kaltura, and other similar technologies to livestream and/or record class sessions to better support students who cannot attend in-person due to illness or other factors. Students have expressed strong appreciation for these support mechanisms. We are witnessing significant differences across instructors and departments in how instructors are making these supports available—if they are at all—and should attempt to strive for greater consistency in the future.

### ***Two Additional Considerations***

1. While virtual experiences have been an important tool for many units to improve access, efficiency, communication, collaboration, teaching, and learning, every virtual experience is not created equal. Differences in quality and approach between people and units—differences in the ability of unit leaders and meeting facilitators to run effective online meetings, differences in the ability of instructors to create engaging online learning experiences—have led to uneven experiences for students and employees alike. While it is clear that virtual experiences will be a critical part of the university’s future, additional thought, support, and training should go into how we design and implement these experiences to ensure high quality and positive outcomes.
2. We must be intentional in determining what meetings and activities will work best in person or in a virtual environment. Prior to the pandemic, best practice for designing effective meetings often asked organizers to consider if their meeting would be better as an email. While this remains good advice, nearly halfway through our third academic year impacted by the pandemic we should also start asking (1) if some of our emails would be more effective as meetings, and (2) if some of our virtual meetings would be more effective in-person.

### **Units that Submitted a Report**

#### *Academic Affairs*

- Counselor and Graduate Education
- Hospitality and Tourism Management
- Major Scholarship Advising
- Management and Marketing
- School of Polytechnic
- Psychology
- Office of the Registrar

#### *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

- Q Center
- TRIO Student Success Services
- TRIO Upward Bound
- Women’s Center

#### *Enrollment Management and the Student Experience*

- Disability Access Center
- Financial Aid
- Leadership Programs
- New Student Programs
- Student Life and Leadership

#### *Financial and Administrative Affairs*

- Athletics
- Facilities Management
- Finance and Accounting
- Human Resources and the Office of Institutional Equity
- Information Technology Services
- University Police

**Documenting and Leveraging COVID-19 Lessons and Innovations**  
*Request for Information and Insights*

The COVID-19 pandemic has afforded everyone at Purdue Fort Wayne the opportunity to rethink how we carry out most aspects of our jobs and contribute to the university’s learning, discovery, and engagement missions.

Our [strategic plan](#) establishes “Innovation” as a core institutional value and highlights “Quality of Place” as a key aspiration. We want to learn more about the specific lessons and innovations your unit has learned and implemented since March 2020 that you will carry forward after the pandemic. As we work together to create a better normal for Purdue Fort Wayne, we can learn from each other about how to operate more effectively and efficiently and how we can better serve students, meet community needs, and carry out core responsibilities.

**What Will We Do with This Information?**

Our goal is to summarize and share your innovations and lessons learned with our university community so that we can multiply their positive impacts moving forward. We also aim to highlight particularly successful efforts in future university communications and events.

**Share Your Lessons and Innovations**

What are you proud of that you want to share with others? What changes, if they were adopted more broadly across campus, have the potential to be transformational? How should we best leverage these innovations and lessons moving forward?

In as much or as little detail as you would like to provide, please use the space below to share the key COVID-19 lessons and innovations that people in your unit will be carrying forward with them into their ongoing work.

*Please do your best to submit your unit’s completed form by Friday, October 29.*



Unit:	
Person Submitting Form:	
Submitting Form For (highlight one):	Unit      Individual

Share your lessons and innovations here (the box will automatically resize to accommodate your text):