



## Institutional Response to COVID-19: Planning and Process Changes

Effective September 1, 2021–August 31, 2022

Institution: Minot State University City, State: Minot, ND

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Please complete the following questions based on the institution's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The prompts below are intended to help institutions articulate to peer review teams adaptations made in response to COVID-19. Understandably, some prompts may not be relevant to all institutions; in such cases, simply indicate so. By focusing institutional adaptations in this form, institutions can provide information to peer review teams about how they are handling the pandemic, while retaining the Assurance Argument's traditional focus on long-term, non-pandemic operations. The COVID-19 Institutional Response should not exceed 12 pages. Upload the form in the Forms tab of the Assurance System prior to the institution's lock date.

### Questions

**Criterion 1. Mission.** Please answer the following questions describing any changes the institution implemented related to Criterion 1.

- What, if any, program changes did the institution implement (e.g., program hiatus, closure, launch) during the 2020–21 academic year? What is the status of those changes for the 2021–22 academic year? How do these service changes align with the institution's mission?

**2020-2021 Academic Year.** During the spring of 2020, Minot State University (MSU) was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic as was the rest of the world. The university's initial response to COVID-19 was to move classes to the online environment after spring break in 2020 (starting March 24). What was initially to be a two-week online-only period turned into the remainder of the semester. The same applied to classes run during the summer of 2020 with some options for students to complete internships, co-ops, and other experiential activities by completing a COVID-19 agreement form and gaining appropriate approvals.

In preparation for the 2020-2021 academic year, COVID-related funds were used to equip nearly all classrooms with HyFlex systems that allowed in-class and remote students to participate in the same classes. Staff from Information Technology Central (ITC) oversaw installation of the HyFlex

systems, which consisted of a PTZ camera, ceiling microphones and speakers, and document cameras. The PTZ cameras could be rotated and zoomed via a remote control. The multiple microphones were automatically controlled to pick up classroom sound where it was happening. The systems allowed remote students to see and hear what was happening in the classroom, and be seen and heard by those in the classroom. The ITC staff also built 25 mobile TV carts with HyFlex systems for use in smaller or non-traditional teaching spaces and at the Minot Air Force Base learning center. ITC distributed more than a hundred webcams to faculty and staff who did not have one built into their devices.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, everyone on campus was required to wear a mask. Social distancing was another important safety protocol followed during the year. The HyFlex capabilities allowed MSU to reduce the number of students in each classroom at any time so that proper social distancing could be maintained. In each classroom, certain seats/desks were either removed, blocked off, or marked so it was clear which seats could be used. For classes too large to fit at one time with the reduced room capacities, instructors set up a rotation for students so they knew when they should attend in person and when they should attend remotely.

Some services and activities were offered virtually instead of face-to-face. The athletic conference canceled or postponed all competitions through December 31, 2020. All governance bodies met virtually. COVID testing was available at least once a week on campus initially and then less frequently. Students were offered single dorms at a reduced rate, and dining had different procedures in place for increased safety. One residence hall and a local hotel were used for isolation of active COVID cases and quarantining for close contacts. All of these activities and more were part of MSU's Fall Restart plan that was communicated over summer and was implemented during 2020-2021.

The measures taken following March 2020 were designed to maintain quality teaching and learning while reducing risk to ensure the safety of students, faculty, and staff. While the classroom technology changes were primarily installed to facilitate effective teaching and learning with reduced classroom capacities, the presence of the technology has provided an opportunity to also enhance course attendance options for students long-term. The benefits have continued into the 2021-2022 year.

**2021-2022 Academic Year.** During 2021-2022, the masking mandate and the classroom spacing restrictions were dropped. However, individual instructors were given the discretion to require individuals to wear a mask in their classroom/lab environments. Instructors were required to list this stipulation in their course syllabus using specific language provided by the VPAA. Individuals were also given the discretion to require masking in their offices or departments. Instructors were also given discretion to offer courses online (synchronous or asynchronous) for health reasons when feasible. Students could request accommodations through Access Services. The classroom technology put in place for the 2020-2021 academic year continued to offer options for remote attendance or recording of classroom activities. Students who identify as close contacts or test positive for COVID-19 are restricted from attending classes or entering campus buildings until they have recovered. For those who self-report to the university, notices are sent to their instructors, who work with students to make appropriate accommodations. The Student Health Center provides COVID-19 testing, and a number of vaccination clinics were held on campus. MSU does not require COVID-19 vaccinations for faculty, staff or students, but some academic program affiliates (clinical sites, lab sites, etc.) do.

During 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, MSU remained focused on its mission to provide an excellent, although different, educational experience for students. Some scholarly opportunities were delayed and others moved to virtual formats. To address faculty concerns about teaching, Faculty

Senate endorsed a statement that encouraged chairs to take these challenges into consideration when reviewing spring 2020 and fall 2020 course evaluations.

Community engagement was reduced during 2020, but improved over time as the world learned more about ways to more safely navigate during the pandemic. Nearly all events canceled during 2020-2021 resumed during 2021-2022. Student activities supported campus life with virtual student activities when face-to-face activities were not possible.

- How has the institution maintained its commitment to the public good during the pandemic? What impact did the pandemic have on its civic engagement/community-based work?

MSU continued to serve the public through its educational offerings and events within safety guidelines. Some civic engagement/community-based work was canceled or rescheduled. For example, the annual Pow Wow, which was scheduled for April 2020, was rescheduled for September 2020 as a drive-through event. Other events, like Campus and Community Dialogues, were held virtually until distancing protocols changed. The Minot Symphony Orchestra reduced capacity in the performance hall to allow distancing, and they also live-streamed performances. MSU worked with public schools, healthcare facilities, and other collaborative partners to still allow students to participate in their educational and volunteer experiences according to the safety protocols required by those entities. When opportunities off-campus were not possible, virtual experiences were often offered.

- Has the institution adjusted its recruitment, enrollment, and support strategies to serve traditionally underserved students? If so, how?

Recruitment and enrollment moved to mostly online and virtual formats when needed, although the enrollment office has been open throughout the pandemic and conducting tours and other business as needed with campus safety protocols in place. The institution has kept its support services available virtually or in-person throughout the pandemic as well. During the 2021-2022 academic year, most of these offices returned to pre-pandemic activities with more virtual offerings and additional flexibility.

**Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct.** Please answer the following questions describing how the institution maintained integrity, as outlined in Criterion 2, as it implemented changes to regular campus practices during this period.

- Has the institution altered any existing policies or procedures (e.g., admissions, grading, registration, etc.) in response to the pandemic? If so, please describe them. Will these changes remain in effect, or will they revert to the original policy after the pandemic has subsided?

**Admissions.** The State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) authorized institutions to temporarily waive the requirement of standardized test scores (ACT or SAT) that are normally submitted as part of the application process for admission to North Dakota's eleven colleges and universities. The waiver is still in place through summer 2023 while the NDUS and SBHE consider a policy to give institutions the option to use test-optional admissions.

Similarly, the SBHE permitted North Dakota University System colleges and universities to accept unofficial copies of high school and college transcripts for the purpose of admission through the summer of 2022.

As a result of these waivers, MSU adjusted its admissions process to allow for these changes. The process is outlined on the COVID-19 admissions page: <https://www.minotstateu.edu/enroll/pages/COVID19.shtml>

**Grading.** All undergraduate students had the option to convert any or all of the (A-F) letter grades they earned in their classes during spring semester 2020 to S/U grading. Students could change to S/U grading through May 1, 2020, and they could change back to A-F grading through the last business day before finals (May 5 for second 8-week classes; May 8 for 16-week classes).

In addition, during spring semester 2020, students with a D or better grade who were actively participating in a class had the option of an incomplete grade, to be arranged between the student and the faculty member teaching the course.

The S/U grading policy overrode all program-level grading policies that were in effect at MSU, including those related to courses within the major, pre-requisite courses, and maximum number of credits that a student can earn with S/U grades. MSU returned to its normal undergraduate grading policies during summer session 2020.

For spring and summer 2020, the incomplete deadline for graduate courses (those numbered 501-599) was extended until the middle of October 2020.

During fall semester 2020, students could change to S/U grading from December 14, 2020 through December 30, 2020, after fall grades posted. Similarly, during spring semester 2021, students could change to S/U grading from May 10, 2021 through May 26, 2021, after grades posted.

During 2021-2022, MSU returned to regular, pre-pandemic grading policies.

**Registration.** During 2020, all new student orientation and registration sessions were virtual via Zoom, Teams, and other virtual meeting platforms. During 2021, registration was offered face-to-face and virtually. Face-to-face and virtual registration continues in 2022, mostly to afford students flexibility, especially those who live far from MSU.

- Has the institution made changes to any contractual agreements during the pandemic that have a bearing on educational activities? If so, please describe them.

No contractual agreements changed. We have continued to work with areas schools, healthcare facilities, and other entities, adapting our practices as needed. For example, during spring 2020, student teachers continued to student teach in whatever way their cooperating teacher was teaching. Some clinical experiences were moved to virtual or simulation to allow students to continue. MSU continues to work with its partners to ensure students are safe and protocols at partnering institutions are followed.

- How did the institution communicate with students, staff and other stakeholders about any relevant operational changes during the pandemic?

MSU's primary communication with stakeholders was electronic. Emails were sent, and a COVID-19 web page was created to post information, cancellations, email communications, and more.

- How has the institution's board been involved in monitoring potential disruptions to the institution's enrollment or financial stability?

According to the VPAF, the ND State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) regularly monitors MSU's (along with all ten other campuses in the ND University System) financial stability with regular reporting of various financial viability ratios. The SBHE's Finance subcommittee monitors these ratios closely, and when they fall outside certain expected levels, the campus must provide a report and follow-up action plan to improve as needed. Regarding enrollment, the SBHE also has been monitoring campus enrollment trends and changes, especially during 2020, due to COVID. The MSU President's annual goal statements include regular reporting and monitoring regarding the impact enrollment has on MSU's financial stability.

**Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support.** Please answer the following questions and describe the institution's ability to provide quality education, teaching and academic support services during this period.

- Which delivery modalities did the institution employ during the 2020-21 academic year? Check all that apply.

- On-site classroom teaching, with social-distancing measures within the classroom

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- On-site classroom teaching, with fewer students in larger classrooms

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- Hybrid models, with some learning in a classroom and some learning online

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- 50% models, with one-half of students in the classroom and one-half present by video conference for each session

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- Synchronous classes, offered online for all students during the regularly scheduled class time

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- Fully online classes, offered using an LMS integrated with regular student/teacher contact

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- Other—Please describe:

- Which delivery modalities will the institution employ during the 2021-22 academic year? Check all that apply.

- On-site classroom teaching, with social-distancing measures within the classroom

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- On-site classroom teaching, with fewer students in larger classrooms

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- Hybrid models, with some learning in a classroom and some learning online

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- 50% models, with one-half of students in the classroom and one-half present by video conference for each session

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- Synchronous classes, offered online for all students during the regularly scheduled class time

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- Fully online classes, offered using an LMS integrated with regular student/teacher contact

Fall                       Spring                       Summer

- Other—Please describe:

Most classes went back to pre-pandemic class sizes with faculty and departments given the option to require masks, use technology as needed, and other options to adapt to the given situation at the given time.

- What type of training did the institution provide for its faculty members on distance learning/hybrid formats to prepare them for this work? Check all that apply.

- Training for all faculty, delivered virtually
- Individual training with IT professional on the campus
- Access to online training on distance delivery offered by an outside provider to all faculty
- Individual training/coaching offered by experienced online faculty members on campus
- Department-level, department-specific training by subject area
- Recorded or live webinars/resources offered by outside providers
- Recorded or live webinars/resources offered by the LMS provider
- Other—please describe:



- Face to face training sessions for faculty delivered by Center for Extended Learning staff
- Recorded training resources for faculty by Center for Extended Learning staff

**Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement.** Please describe how the institution maintained the evaluation and improvement, as outlined in Criterion 4, as it implemented changes to regular campus practices during this period.

- How has the institution's ongoing student assessment changed since the pandemic began? If the institution altered the regular assessment program or processes, what has the institution implemented instead to assess student outcomes during the pandemic?

MSU's ongoing student assessment has not changed during the COVID-19 disruption.

Unlike campuses in many other parts of the country, MSU has been open the majority of the pandemic. Only during the second half of spring semester 2020 did all classes move to remote instruction. MSU took advantage of socially distanced, in-person learning starting fall 2020 with HyFlex used when needed. As a result, MSU's assessment cycles were not affected as much as other institutions may have been.

During the pandemic, only one semester or less of each academic year was typically affected, reducing the impact on processes. During 2019-2020, the second half of spring 2020 was impacted by the pandemic. Summer 2020 wasn't much different than previous summers with most courses offered online, and a COVID-19 student and employer/supervisor agreement form used for internships, co-ops, and other experiential learning activities, which allowed students to continue to participate. Some activities that couldn't be completed during spring 2020 were completed that summer. During 2020-2021, fall semester 2020 was affected most. As people returned to campus, anxiety about COVID-19 was high, and quarantine and isolation rules were stricter.

- How has the pandemic affected the institution's or individual departments' ability to integrate assessment data into ongoing program improvement? Note successes, as well as gaps.

Faculty have continued to collect data and write annual assessment reports throughout the pandemic. Programs that required hands-on practice, performances, exhibits, and other face-to-face experiences had to adapt their practices and timing of some data collection, especially early in the pandemic.

The sudden shift to remote/online instruction mid-spring semester 2020 created the biggest challenge. Clinical programs (nursing, education, communication sciences and disorders, art, and music) have gaps in their data due to experiences in the field not being completed or completed later in the student's coursework. When appropriate or when able, practices were adapted to make some experiences possible. Due to adapted practices and some gaps in data, the results should be interpreted with caution at times.

Co-curricular activities continued in remote format during spring 2020. They were socially distanced, outside, or remote during fall 2020 and spring 2021. The return of athletic competitions in spring 2021 and the use of vaccinations mid-way through the semester helped campus return to more normal operations.

- How have the institution's retention, persistence and completion initiatives been affected by the pandemic?

Throughout the pandemic, all student support services continued to operate in-person or virtually. First-year experience learning communities were full during fall 2020. The campus's TRIO grants were renewed during 2020-2021 for another 5-years. The Retain and Graduate Committee continued to meet. A strategic planning retreat was held virtually in April 2021. It focused on ways in which MSU should plan for the future while considering the impact of the pandemic on current and future operations.

MSU's retention rates have remained around 70% for the past 5 years: Fall 2016 70.0%, Fall 2017 69.0%, Fall 2018 70.0%, Fall 2019 72.0%, and Fall 2020 71.0%.

MSU's 6-year graduation rate jumped dramatically in 2020 to 55% after being around 45% for many years: 2016 43%; 2017 37%; 2018 46%; 2019 45%; 2020 55%; and 2021 46%.

The cohort analysis completed by MSU's data metrics team indicates that 39% of the 2016 cohort have already graduated from MSU; over 9% are still attending MSU; and 1.6% stopped out and returned. Thus, MSU could have up to a 49% graduation rate for 2022, which would be similar to previous years. Almost 27% of the 2017 cohort have already graduated from MSU; almost 23% are still attending MSU; and 3% stopped out and returned. The 2018 and 2019 cohorts still have 52% and 66% of students attending MSU and another 2.3% and 0.8%, respectively, who stopped out and returned. Typically, 10-15% of MSU students attend and graduate from another institution after attending MSU. Data indicate that trend continues. The persistence rate from fall 2020 to spring 2021 was 90.4% which is typical each year.

Thus, retention and persistence rates do not appear to be negatively affected by the pandemic. Graduation rates are more difficult to predict, but appear to be similar to previous years so far.

**Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning.** Please describe how the institution maintained effectiveness, resources and planning, as outlined in Criterion 5, as it implemented changes to regular campus practices during this period.

- How has the pandemic affected enrollments? For each term listed below, please indicate an approximate percent increase or decrease.

○ Fall 2020

Increase                       Decrease                       No change

Percent change:

Less than 5%                       5% to 10%                       More than 10%

○ Spring 2021

Increase                       Decrease                       No change

Percent change:

Less than 5%                       5% to 10%                       More than 10%



o Summer 2021

Increase  Decrease  No change

Percent change:

Less than 5%  5% to 10%  More than 10%

o Fall 2021

Increase  Decrease  No change

Percent change:

Less than 5%  5% to 10%  More than 10%

o Spring 2022

Increase  Decrease  No change

Percent change:

Less than 5%  5% to 10%  More than 10%

o Summer 2022

Increase  Decrease  No change

Percent change:

Less than 5%  5% to 10%  More than 10%

o Other: Please describe any other COVID-19 enrollment impacts:

- Excluding tuition income, what is the likelihood that other funding sources will remain as budgeted? If unlikely, how much of a revenue loss does the institution expect in this funding category?

According to the VPAF, state legislative funding is anticipated to be reduced by \$2.2 million for the 2023-2025 biennium per the state funding formula. The legislature may take action to reduce that amount or provide additional revenues for requested programming, but that is unknown at this time. Auxiliary revenues (room and board) have decreased as the competitive housing rates in Minot has impacted residence hall occupancy. MSU has successfully mitigated much of the impact from the reduced revenues through cost containment initiatives.

- What measures, if any, has the institution taken to address budgetary issues during the pandemic?

With far fewer people on campus during spring and summer 2020, utility costs were less than during previous years. In addition, the inability of faculty, staff, and students to travel during 2020

reduced expenses. Federal grant dollars allocated directly to MSU or through the Governor's office, helped MSU pay for supplies (masks, cleaning supplies, etc.); new rooftop units for improved air quality and circulation; technology for classrooms, faculty, staff, and students; renovated simulation space for nursing; safety barriers in offices; additional laptops; funds to students; and more. The legislature appropriated \$25 million for the renovation of Hartnett Hall, an academic building that houses art, professional communication, world languages and cultural studies, a theatre, and a variety of teaching spaces. The additional funds benefited MSU and improved its finances.

- What emergency policies or procedures, if any, has the institution invoked because of the pandemic?

Some of the actions MSU has taken in response to the pandemic are:

- Reduced class sizes
  - HyFlex technology and related equipment was added to nearly every campus classroom and several other spaces (e.g., meeting rooms) on campus
  - All classes went online during the last half of the spring semester 2020
  - Disinfecting procedures were enhanced
  - Personnel were provided prevention education
  - Faculty were provided training to teach online and to use HyFlex and other technology
  - Thermal scan temperature-taking cameras are being installed in all academic buildings
  - Bipolar ionization equipment has been ordered and will be installed in most campus buildings
  - Robust testing was implemented with help from the Department of Health and the National Guard
  - One residence hall was repurposed as a quarantine center
  - Suspended travel
  - Suspended on-campus activities at times
  - Used social distancing and other safety protocols like required face coverings
  - COVID-19 GEER and HEER funds were awarded and used to support pandemic-related efforts
  - S/U grading – A student resolution was sent to Faculty Senate, which adopted an amended version
  - Extended drop / add deadlines during spring 2020
  - Summer 2020 faculty committee to prepare for fall 2020
  - MSU COVID-19 Taskforce for regular communication
  - MSU COVID-19 webpage for communication to internal and external stakeholders
  - Hosted vaccination clinics
  - Incentivized students to get vaccinated
  - Coordinated registry system for students to notify campus of infection and communicate with faculty
- How have these changes affected institutional budgets for educational programs, support services and cocurricular activities?

Institutional budgets for all programs have not been significantly impacted. Many of the additional COVID-related expenses have been covered by CARES Act and other governmental funding sources.

- What type of pandemic-related planning is the institution doing for Academic Year 2022–23?

As mentioned earlier, MSU has been open most of the pandemic unlike campuses in many other parts of the country. It has, of course, had to deal with the same issues as other campuses-- social distancing; different teaching modalities to increase flexibility; masks; sick students, faculty and, staff; quickly responding during an outbreak; and other adaptations—but in many ways, MSU has been operating during 2021-2022 much like it did pre-pandemic. MSU anticipates 2022-2023 will look much like 2021-2022 with students on campus, face-to-face activities, safety options for those who need them, and other actions that have become a regular part of its operations (e.g., more options to participate in class or meetings virtually, options to wear or require masks for vulnerable populations).