

VERSION APRIL 19, 2020

C O N S U P
COUNCIL OF NOVA SCOTIA UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS

Suite 403, 5657 Spring Garden Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 3R4
Telephone (902) 425-4230 Fax (902) 425-4233

NOVA SCOTIA HIGHER EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

FALL 2021

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FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVE

This Framework is meant to serve as a guide for the Higher Education sector in Nova Scotia to promote consistency in regard to fall 2021 operations and activities from a COVID-19 perspective.

The objective is to develop a common approach agreeable with all institutions on with how general high level mitigation efforts are instituted and operationalized.

FRAMEWORK ASSUMPTIONS

1. By September 2021 a large percentage our institutional communities as well as the general public will be vaccinated/partially vaccinated, including the university age student population.
 2. The Public Health “Emergency” declaration is expected to no longer be in place in the mid-summer timeline.
 3. Public Health restrictions are expected to gradually allow for greater gathering limits and a broader re-opening of our community.
 4. COVID-19 will remain an active concern and some people will continue to be infected and may become very sick, however the overall risk to the broader community should continue to diminish throughout 2021 into 2022.
 5. It is possible for some that have been partially / fully vaccinated to still contract COVID-19 but experience milder symptoms.
 6. General Public Health recommendations such as hand sanitization, cleaning protocols and mask use are expected remain throughout 2021.
 7. It is expected that the reliance on 2-meter physical distancing as a strict requirement will diminish (although it will continue to offer an additional layer of protection). An approximate 1-meter physical distancing should be provided for in most conditions.
 8. Existing vaccinations should continue to prove effective against emerging variants.
 9. Plans that are developed will need to have flexibility to allow for any unforeseen epidemiological developments which could complicate and alter these assumptions.
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SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS AND SUCCESSES

The Higher Education Sector is committed to the Health, Safety and Wellness of all our Faculty, Staff and Students. Throughout the pandemic, the sector has worked closely with the Provincial

Department of Labour and Advanced Education and the Provincial Public Health Office to ensure availability of the most current information and that operations and activities were in compliance.

The sector has developed a toolbox of measures that have been used strategically to control the potential spread of COVID-19 including:

1. Working remotely initiatives
2. Remote teaching initiatives
3. Physical distancing
4. Limited gathering sizes
5. Restricting activities
6. Travel restrictions
7. Physical barriers
8. Training, signage, policies, and safety protocols
9. Masks
10. Cleaning and disinfection programs
11. Area ventilation assessments
12. COVID-19 screening protocols
13. Contact tracing information gathering
14. Registrar Office student tracing programs
15. Employee accommodation programs
16. Asymptomatic testing
17. Wastewater COVID-19 monitoring

The sector overall has demonstrated its ability to comply and adapt to the Public Health and Occupational Health and Safety requirements as well as balancing academic demands, student experience, and faculty and staff expectations.

Overall, the Higher Education sector has shown leadership in this field and is very proud of this base of experience which has informed the development of this framework.

This framework will safely enable the sector to open widely this fall with the planned multiple layers of protections.

ACADEMIC OPERATIONS

GENERAL TEACHING

General teaching will be mainly on-campus with institutions having the autonomy to determine course delivery method (in person, remote/online, hybrid, etc.).

Considerations:

- Students shall be encouraged to prescreen for the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 prior to attending class.
- An approximate 1-meter physical distancing should be provided for in most conditions.
- The use of masks for indoor classes, where practical, until such time that N.S. Public Health relaxes this current advice.

- A mechanism shall be developed to gather contact tracing information and shall be maintained a rolling 30-day period. May include physical attendance, tracking app, or student check in combined with course registration information, etc.
- Sufficient supplies hand sanitization supplies should be readily available.
- Process shall be developed to ensure teaching spaces are cleaned / sanitized regularly.
- Develop and implement strong COVID-19 awareness, communication and signage programs.
- Instructional areas shall be cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Develop mechanisms to minimize student accumulation areas such as queuing during entering and exiting classrooms.
- Area ventilation (passive or mechanical) reviews are advisable to minimize potential SARS-CoV-2 aerosol accumulation.

EXAMS / DEFENSES

Exams / defenses will be primarily in-person, at Institutional discretion. General COVID-19 protocols for teaching will be applied.

FIELD WORK/ STUDIES

Field work that can be performed in compliance with institutional general teaching COVID-19 mitigation expectations and current Nova Scotia Public Health restrictions generally can proceed in person. Additional considerations may apply for international work, based on the country in question.

Considerations

- Consider a process where field work / studies are vetted through an internal process that ensures all N.S. Public Health and Institutional level requirements are being observed.
- International work may require additional screening, based on the country requested and work involved.
- Consider general public implications (if any).
- Consider jurisdictional implications (if involves travel outside of N.S.).
- Consider insurance coverage for COVID-19 implications.
- Consider a reference to Federal travel requirements <https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid>

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING

Essential experiential teaching generally has continued in person for the duration of the pandemic. Expansions of this critical program will continue as required.

General COVID-19 protocols for teaching will apply.

Considerations

- In situations where an approximate 1-meter physical distancing is not practical, masks/ physical barriers shall be required.
- There may be a benefit to consider the development of student cohorts in programs which require students to interact closely with each other.

RESEARCH OPERATIONS

Research can occur in person based on plans that are institutionally assessed for Public Health, Occupational Health and Safety, and Institutional requirements.

ON CAMPUS / OFF CAMPUS RESEARCH

Considerations

- An approximate 1-meter physical distancing should be provided for in most conditions.
- Where an approximate 1-meter physical distancing is not practical physical barriers shall be considered.
- The use of masks, where practical, for shared indoor group areas until such time that N.S. Public Health relaxes this current advice.
- A mechanism shall be developed to gather contact tracing information and shall be maintained a rolling 30-day period.
- Shared equipment shall be suitably cleaned /disinfected between users.
- Personnel to prescreen for COVID-19 signs and symptoms prior to attending campus.
- Sufficient supplies hand sanitization supplies should be readily available.
- Areas shall be cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Develop and Implement strong COVID-19 awareness, communication, and signage programs.
- Area ventilation (passive or mechanical) reviews are advisable to minimize potential SARS-CoV-2 aerosol accumulation

RESEARCH WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Considerations

- In addition to the general on / off Campus research expectations, research with human participants should consider rates of local levels of COVID-19 activity and Public Health recommendations and adapt quickly to suspend/ reduce as practical, or to implement additional safety protocols.
- Additional considerations should be made to effectively communicate institutional COVID-19 tools and processes to members of the public before they arrive. This may include information about prescreening, mask use, contact tracing systems, etc.

FACULTY AND STAFF

Faculty and Staff will be able to resume regular operation, based on plans that are institutionally assessed for Public Health, Occupational Health and Safety and Institutional requirements

Considerations

- An approximate 1-meter physical distancing should be provided for in most conditions.
- Where an approximate 1-meter physical distancing is not practical, physical barriers shall be considered.
- The general use of masks, where practical, for shared indoor group areas until such time that N.S. Public Health relaxes this current advice.

- A mechanism shall be developed to gather contact tracing information and shall be maintained a rolling 30-day period.
- Shared equipment shall be suitably cleaned and disinfected between users.
- Personnel to prescreen for COVID-19 signs and symptoms prior to attending campus.
- Sufficient hand sanitization supplies should be available.
- Process shall be developed to ensure office spaces are cleaned / sanitized regularly.
- Develop and Implement strong COVID -19 awareness, communication, and signage programs.
- Area ventilation (passive or mechanical) reviews are advisable to minimize potential SARS-CoV-2 aerosol accumulation

GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Support services groups have typically had a physical presence throughout the pandemic, and it is expected that this will expand as required using the general Faculty and Staff COVID-19 expectations

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

In general, institutions will be broadly returning preexisting student supports.

RESIDENCE OPERATIONS

Residence operations will increase capacities with the following considerations:

Considerations

- An approximate 1-meter physical distancing should be provided for in most conditions.
- Where an approximate 1-meter physical distancing is not practical, physical barriers shall be considered.
- Use of masks, where practical, for shared indoor group areas until such time that N.S. Public Health relaxes this current advice.
- A mechanism shall be developed to gather contact tracing information for visitors and shall be maintained a rolling 30-day period.
- Shared facilities shall be suitably cleaned and disinfected between users.
- Students shall be encouraged to monitor for COVID-19 signs and symptoms.
- Sufficient supplies hand sanitization supplies should be readily available.
- Areas shall be cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Develop and Implement strong COVID-19 awareness, communication, and signage programs.
- Institutions shall have sufficient plans and capacity to manage any isolations / self-isolations or segregations that may be necessary due to travel / sickness /or other Public Health requirements.
- Double room occupancy is acceptable subject to appropriate implementation strategies being included in the institutional level plans.
- Institutions should consider the encouragement of asymptomatic testing initiatives.
- Area ventilation (passive or mechanical) reviews are advisable to minimize potential SARS-CoV-2 aerosol accumulation

- Institutions may consider the addition of COVID-19 wastewater monitoring programs as an early signal of SARS-CoV-2 activity. Although this research has not been fully reviewed, it may provide a beneficial input to operational decisions.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Institutions may consider attendance with international students. Details are to be included in the institutional level plans.

Considerations

- Develop plans to maintain compliance to any Federal and Provincial, Public Health requirements.
- Travel / quarantine / self-isolation requirements may be necessary.

DINING HALLS

Dining halls are expected to operate at a level required to meet the student needs with the following considerations.

Considerations

- An approximate 1-meter physical distancing should be provided for in most conditions.
- Where an approximate 1-meter physical distancing is not practical, physical barriers shall be considered.
- Use of masks, where practical, for shared indoor group areas until such time that N.S. Public Health relaxes this current advice.
- A mechanism shall be developed to gather contact tracing information and shall be maintained a rolling 30-day period.
- Students shall be encouraged to monitor for COVID-19 signs and symptoms.
- Sufficient supplies hand sanitization supplies should be readily available.
- Areas shall be cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Mechanisms to minimize student accumulation areas such as queuing during entering and exiting dining halls shall be developed.
- Strong COVID-19 awareness, communication and signage programs shall be developed and implemented.
- Institutions should consider plans and capacity to manage providing student meals where isolations / self-isolations or segregations that may be necessary due to travel or sickness.
- Area ventilation (passive or mechanical) reviews are advisable to minimize potential SARS-CoV-2 aerosol accumulation

STUDENT SERVICES

These services could include the following (not exhaustive);

- Libraries
- Accounts payable
- Registrar's office
- Student counseling
- Food services
- Study areas
- Book stores

Considerations

- An approximate 1-meter physical distancing should be provided for in most conditions.
- Where an approximate 1-meter physical distancing is not practical, physical barriers shall be considered.
- Use of masks, where practical, for shared indoor group areas until such time that N.S. Public Health relaxes this current advice.
- A mechanism shall be developed to gather contact tracing information and shall be maintained a rolling 30-day period.
- Shared facilities shall be suitably cleaned and disinfected between users.
- Sufficient supplies hand sanitization supplies should be readily available.
- Areas shall be cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Strong COVID-19 awareness, communication, and signage programs shall be developed and implemented.
- Area ventilation (passive or mechanical) reviews are advisable to minimize potential SARS-CoV-2 aerosol accumulation.

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

Student Health Services have generally remained open to some level throughout the pandemic and are anticipated to increase capacities to meet the expectations of the expanded on-campus student community. Expansions are based on plans that are institutionally assessed for Public Health, Occupational Health and Safety, and Institutional requirements

Considerations

- An approximate 1-meter physical distancing should be provided for in most conditions.
- Where an approximate 1-meter physical distancing is not practical, physical barriers shall be considered.
- Use of masks, where practical, for shared indoor group areas until such time that N.S. Public Health relaxes this current advice.
- A mechanism shall be developed to gather contact tracing information and shall be maintained a rolling 30-day period.
- Shared facilities shall be suitably cleaned and disinfected between users.
- Personnel shall be encouraged to monitor for COVID-19 sign and symptoms.
- Sufficient supplies hand sanitization supplies should be readily available.
- Process shall be developed to ensure spaces are cleaned / sanitized regularly.
- Develop and Implement strong COVID-19 awareness, communication, and signage programs.
- Area ventilation (passive or mechanical) reviews are advisable to minimize potential SARS-CoV-2 aerosol accumulation

STUDENT SOCIETIES

Student Societies have generally greatly reduced in-person activities throughout the pandemic but are anticipated to resume such activities to previous levels based on plans that are assessed for Public Health, Occupational Health and Safety, and Institutional requirements through our Institutional Student Unions.

Considerations

- Student societies are expected to operate in a manner that is consistent with the institutional approach with respect to COVID-19.
- Institutions may desire to maintain a level of oversight on Student Society activities.

STUDENT EVENTS

In-person student events have generally remained at a low level throughout the pandemic but are anticipated to return to previous levels based on plans that are assessed for Public Health, Occupational Health and Safety and Institutional requirements.

Considerations:

- Student led events are expected to operate in a manner that is consistent with the institutional approach with respect to COVID-19 and in compliance with current N.S. Public Health requirements/ recommendations.
- Institutions may desire to maintain a level of oversight on student led events.

ATHLETICS OPERATIONS

Athletic operations will continue to operate as throughout the pandemic in compliance with the guidance provided directly by N.S. Public Health and the related approved sporting association COVID-19 plans.

The level of participation in these operations is an institution level decision.

ARTS AND CULTURE OPERATIONS

Arts and Culture operations has been significantly minimized to date however will open in compliance with the guidance provided directly by N.S. Public Health and the Nova Scotia Department of Communities Culture and Heritage.

The level of participation in these operations is an institution level decision.

PUBLIC BUILDING ACCESS

Institutions shall observe public building access expectations as outlined in the Nova Scotia Public Health emergency order until such time it is rescinded.

Considerations:

Libraries, common public areas, etc.