



650 W. State Street • Room 307 • Boise, ID • 83702
P.O. Box 83720 • Boise, ID • 83720-0037

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Contact: Mike Keckler
208-332-1591 (office)
208-866-5734 (cell)
Mike.Keckler@osbe.idaho.gov

Higher Education’s Plan for the Fall Semester

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

Idaho’s higher education institutions executed a remarkable pivot this spring by moving hundreds of in-person classes to distance learning options such as online, video and teleconference in a short period of time. With the COVID-19 pandemic expected to be active for the foreseeable future, our colleges and universities are now focused on the fall semester and what instruction will look like for their students.

In late May, the institutions presented their plans to high school counselors and advisors from around the state via a Zoom meeting that included an appearance by Idaho Governor Brad Little. “Whether you are a higher education institution or a local school district, you have to be prepared for contingencies,” the Governor said.

The fall semester contingencies run the gamut and include lessons learned during the spring semester. “We’ll have face-to face, remote and hybrid courses and our goals are simple,” said Boise State University President Dr. Marlene Tromp. “We want to keep people safe and on track to reach their goals, and we want to get people connected with each other, which is part of the university experience.”

The *connection* part of the college experience is paramount to institution plans across Idaho. “One of the lessons we learned during the spring was that while we can deliver distance-based instruction, what we demonstrated was the real value of

face-to-face education,” Idaho State University President Kevin Satterlee said. “The interaction between a student and their faculty, the connections that are made, the interplay, the back and forth that learning can be and how we can continue that.”

Many of Idaho’s colleges and universities are planning to start the fall semester on August 24th. To keep students safely separated and to ensure social distancing, large in-person classes will be held in ballrooms, medium-sized classes will be held in larger classrooms like lecture halls, and small classes will be held in medium-sized classrooms. “This is about living a vibrant, virus-ready reality, because that is our reality and it is going to be this way for a while, not just a matter of days or weeks but months and possibly years,” Lewis-Clark State College President Dr. Cynthia Pemberton said.

The Zoom presentations are posted on the State Board’s Next Steps Idaho website: <https://nextsteps.idaho.gov/fall-re-opening-plans-via-governor-little-higher-ed-presidents/>

You can watch the Governor’s message, all eight public institution presentations, and/or just the recordings that interest you.

This has been a difficult year for all of us, particularly our most recent high school graduates who lost a good portion of their senior year. We must do all we can to help those students get back on track and to support current college students who may be wondering if they should continue their education. Much time, effort and planning have gone into these plans, and Idaho’s higher education institutions are prepared and ready to safely welcome students back to campus. And if necessary, they will be ready to pivot again too.

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