



# COVID-19 pandemic: the case of Laguna state polytechnic university community response

Rina J. Arcigal

Laguna State Polytechnic University-Santa Cruz Main Campus, Philippines

✉ Email: [rina.arcigal0110@gmail.com](mailto:rina.arcigal0110@gmail.com);  ORCID: 0000-0002-8823-6522

## ABSTRACT

While there are limited vaccine to prevent the coronavirus disease, chairperson of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) also asked students and personnel to strictly follow recommended preventive actions to avoid being exposed to the virus and to prevent its spread, such as avoiding close contact with people who are sick, staying home when sick, covering mouth and nose when sneezing, cleaning and disinfecting frequently used objects, and sanitizing hands regularly. The CHED chairman added that tertiary institutions must ensure that there are adequate safeguards within the campus such as hand sanitizers and information tools such as tarpaulins showing preventive measures to take against the disease. This study specifically, intends to describe the level of responsiveness of Laguna State Polytechnic University (LSPU) in coronavirus (COVID -19) pandemic which includes: the planning phase, enhanced communication due to reports of effective human-to-human disease transmission, social distancing, pandemic period, and management of pandemic cases. Also, this research tends to develop a resulting plan outlines departments, activities, and resources that are necessary in the milestone decisions. This research also undertakes the important task of measuring the economic and social importance of different social distancing and pharmaceutical interventions that are normally adopted by the public health officials and private citizens in an effort to fight COVID-19 pandemic. These interventions may include social distancing, a prioritized governmental distribution of vaccines and antiviral medications, and pharmaceutical consumption in the private sector. Individuals may possess strong private incentives to avoid the disease, and are willing to self-impose social distancing measures. Traditional models in epidemiology and economics focus on the prevalence of the disease. Result of this study showed that LSPU promptly responded to the pandemic by going online. In record time, the administrators, staff, as well as the students moved from physical spaces that provided them with much social interactions. LSPU shift to online platforms happened and mainly driven by the academic needs of the whole academic community and had digital learning platforms in place, and the means to operate, for the continuous education of the students. As the situation continuous to develop, the administrators are taking active role in addressing both the immediate and long-term challenges related to the outbreak. The LSPU community initializing to help students with lack of access to internet connection by proving E-Bus that are deployed to different part of the community.

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## INTRODUCTION

The spread of COVID-19 throughout the world is evidence that the virus does not discriminate (Khan et al., 2020). It has infected individuals from all nations, backgrounds, ages, races, genders, and economic status (Mas-Coma et al., 2020). However, the impact of the virus is and will be felt very differently by various populations. The most vulnerable people in our society are likely to disproportionately suffer

from the health and economic implications of this crisis.

According the reports of [Manila Bulletin \(March 22, 2020\)](#), a 35-year-old man from Lucena, City and two residents of Sariaya, Quezon were confirmed to be positive of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Quezon province where there were still 60 patients under investigation (PUI). The Integrated Provincial Hospital Office (IPHO) said the COVID-19 positive patient from Lucena had travel history to

Thailand and Singapore. IPHO Head Dr. Grace Santiago stated that there were still 31 PUIs confined in hospitals, and 29 on home quarantine. Eleven PUIs have been discharged from medical facilities, and five were already cleared of the viral infection. Meanwhile in Laguna, Sta. Rosa City Mayor [Arlene Arcillas](#) said the city government was conducting contact tracing on a resident of a subdivision in Barangay Balibago who tested positive for COVID-19.

Laguna Health Provincial Office had confirmed that at least there were eight cases of COVID-19 infection in the province ([COVID-19 cases Laguna, Philippines, 2022](#)). Santa Rosa was the first one which reported had a case followed now by five cases within a week. Then Biñan came out with a 58 year old female, a residence of Las Villas de Manila in Brgy. San Francisco. Because of this, the local city administration ordered that the secondary gate of the subdivision be padlocked and an immediate disinfection be performed not only in the said subdivision but the whole barangay as well.

On the other hand, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) said, state and local universities and colleges (SUCs and LUCs) are in a better position to decide on whether to cancel classes or not amid the threat of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the country. "If they have the right information, they have the right network, and they are prepared, they are in a better position to decide rather than the commission," CHED Chairperson J. Prospero De Vera III said in a press conference in Quezon City on Monday. De Vera pointed out that it is "impractical" for CHED to unilaterally cancel classes in universities and colleges on a nationwide level as the condition of the COVID-19 cases varies at every local level.

Apparently, Laguna State Polytechnic University's (LSPU), reiterated the guidelines it earlier issued for higher education institutions (HEIs) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students and personnel. "CHED already issued an advisory three weeks ago on how the SUCs should be prepared. Number one, make sure that the right information is disseminated. That is very important, which means they should only use official government information," De Vera said, as cited by LSPU President, Dr. Mario R. Briones.

Some of the important reminders to consider according to the higher officials are the following: 1.) They should also make sure that if there are people who have signs of COVID-19, they can be referred immediately to the appropriate hospital; 2.) They should look at their activities in the context of government information. If the scheduling of the event appears that there is a heightened government action, they should postpone it as needed; 3.) Based on the guidelines released by the Commission last month, it recommended to HEIs the creation of a central in-house resource of COVID-related information available for students and institute personnel.

With these, it is imperative to know the responses of LSPU in coping up with the crisis being felt by the people around the university, the possible plans and interventions on the part of the administrators, academic personnel, as well as the students in order to safeguard the welfare of the whole school community.

## ■ METHODOLOGY

In this study, an empirical qualitative approach was employed wherein the result was based on observation and measurement of phenomena, as directly experienced by the researcher. The data thus gathered may be compared against a theory or hypothesis, but the results are still based on real life experience. This uncertainty led the University of LSPU workgroup to develop a plan that could be applied to any communicable disease outbreak that is widespread and severely impacts the members of the University community.

### **Defining university level of response**

It is very difficult to identify triggers that dictate a set of responses and actions. Moreover, there is a continuum of possibilities for the existing pandemic. There likely not be one isolated trigger that clearly necessitates increased response, especially at early stages of awareness regarding an emerging pathogen. 1.) Response Level 1= Planning Level; The current planning phase, 2.) Response Level 2= High Alert Level; Enhanced communication due to reports of effective human-to-human disease transmission; 3.)

Response Level 3= Full Alert (Social Distancing) Social distancing of students to reduce illness and disease transmission on campus; 4.) Response Level 4= Pandemic Period. Suspension of normal university operations due to pandemic conditions; 5.) Response Level 5= Management of pandemic cases on campus. Plans for responding to ill individuals on campus (World Health Organization).

## ■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Response level 1- planning level**

The University remains engaged in pandemic planning which has been triggered by circumstances and events that have prompted experts to anticipate human-to-human transmission of an emerging or re-emerging pathogen. This document provides tangible products representative of the University's response.

### **Response Level 2: High Alert (enhanced communication due to reports of effective human-to-human disease transmission)**

This response level is likely to be necessitated by confirmed reports of efficient and sustained human-to-human transmission of an emerging or re-emerging virulent pathogen anywhere in the university. It is fully expected that such reports generate a flurry of school activity across the university, which in turn will multiply external and internal queries about the disease and situation.

The Office of the President and the Campus Directors used a variety of tactics to communicate during the high alert stage. For general information, the department provides web linkages to the University. This page provides a wealth of links to employee and staff and expert panel websites, response information, travel advisories, frequently asked questions, and information for protecting family and loved ones. During this High Alert level, the University must be ready to respond to internal queries from its faculty, staff, and students and to external queries from concerned parents, visitors to the University.

During the High Alert level, the University is mindful of members of the University community that are in nearby municipalities. A system is in place to identify students who are off campus for University-related functions (internships, sponsored

trips, clinical placements, etc.). The whereabouts of individuals performing University functions would be helpful in a pandemic scenario due to impending or enforced travel restrictions. Also, it may be necessary to be aware that an individual's recent travel destinations have included areas where illness is prevalent, so that the individual may be appropriately screened or quarantined before returning to campus

### **Response Level 3: Full Alert (social distancing)**

This response level is associated with confirmed reports that there has been human-to-human transmission of an emerging or re-emerging pathogen anywhere in the vicinity of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford campus. The vicinity of campus is defined by an area that encompasses all locales that are within a typical daily commuting distance by automobile. This response level is prompted by a scenario where emerging illness is spreading across the school community. There is a heightened fear among the place. The University is receiving numerous inquiries per day regarding the status of student whereabouts, classes, social events, research studies, and provision of other services. Assuming that a majority of social activities such as college and senior high school activities, sporting events, meetings, and other gatherings have been suspended, there may be increased pressure to disperse students from campus in order to reduce the spread of disease.

#### **Social distancing**

Absent a government mandate, early decision making to enact "social distancing" at University campuses may be prudent to minimize demand for on-campus LSPU students. In essence, social distancing for the University would encompass a temporary suspension of classroom activity. (This is not equivalent to a temporary suspension of all classes. Many classroom activities will continue via distance learning.)

It is recognized that there are legal, financial, and reputational risks in acting too early (and too late). The duration of social distancing be determined by the disease profile, external circumstances, and the timing of the decision relative to the academic calendar. In the event of a decision to enact social distancing, an organized dispersal of students from campus will be attempted using a multiple-day

process that mirrors the current "arrival survival" process.

#### **Absenteeism**

During this response level in which social distancing is assumed and classroom activity is temporarily suspended, the faculty and staff are assumed to be available to work. Based on the social stressors that are anticipated during this scenario, absenteeism rates of 10-25% are projected. Human Resources is examining existing policies surrounding sick time, leave of absence, and paid time off in response to these scenarios. Essential personnel have been identified and have explored the implications of an absenteeism rate of 10-25%.

Faculty and staff who indicate any of the symptoms associated with the pandemic disease profile be instructed to immediately leave campus and to seek treatment through their health care provider. Information will also be communicated to faculty and staff that if they become sick, under no circumstances are they to report to campus. During this response level, the University will be focused on the housing and feeding of remaining students, enhancing communication, maintaining campus security and computer networks, and sustaining the research enterprise.

#### **Academic considerations**

Academic considerations prior to enacting a social distancing response is a critical decision making. The academic considerations are highly dependent on existing academic policies, and the period of the academic calendar in which the social distancing decision arises. Timing for scheduling of classes are all be considered in the decision to enact social distancing. Existing communication chains utilizing all appropriate technologies are utilized at each level to the extent possible during the period of the emergency to provide the most reliable and structured dissemination of information as to immediate actions.

#### **Communications**

The University's home page used for institutional announcements, particularly to students and parents, as well as to the general public. Specific announcements directed to faculty, staff, and students are developed and available to appropriate groups through email. The University's secure portal

was being utilized to provide a reliable means of communication with faculty, staff, and students. Email was utilized as appropriate to communicate directly with individuals and groups.

The University's communications maintained at the highest level of efficiency. It is critical that the University's computer and telephone networks remain fully staffed and operational to ensure secure and reliable communications. Staffing network and telephone operations was given the highest priority; and ensuring the continued availability of key individuals will be critical

Given the necessary reliance on multiple means of communications, it is critical that one office have responsibility for ensuring that all communications are consistent and timely. The office ICTS will assume this role.

#### **Suspension of classroom activity**

Classroom activity was formally cancelled on a campus-wide basis when, in the judgment of the University President and Campus Directors, acting upon the advice of competent authorities and pursuant to an agreed upon response level, class attendance would pose a risk of contagion or when a sufficient number of faculty and staff are not available to conduct classes or provide appropriate levels of support for students. Individual faculty may not change the method of instruction utilized for individual classes, such as substituting online instruction for classroom instruction, unless approved by the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs (OVPA) and Dean. The announcement of the cancellation of classes was communicated centrally through the University Home Page, as well as via the telephone and email contact lists. The impact of the cancellation of classes on the academic calendar should be as minimal as possible, and every effort was made to return to the normal calendar quickly. Subsequent academic terms should not be reduced in length; rather, the summer months should be used to provide the necessary flexibility in scheduling.

#### **Faculty**

Faculty who become ill, or whose family become ill, or who are subject to quarantine and cannot conduct their assignments was subjected to the normal University policies as specified in the faculty

and medical and leave policies. Faculty who are able to do so is normally be expected to carry on to the greatest extent possible their academic responsibilities even if classes are cancelled, pursuant to the class cancellation policy. To the extent possible, faculty should utilize online or other appropriate distance forms of instruction and communication with students to ensure the continuation of appropriate academic work and to maintain the integrity of instruction and evaluation.

***The university's network and applications, portal in terms of providing remote access to institutional resources***

These resources permit some level of academic work to continue during the period of the emergency, whether the students are home or are quarantined on campus. The extent to which this is possible will depend upon the severity and extent of the disruption and largely dependent upon the academic judgment of individual faculty.

***Deans***

Deans of the individual colleges are responsible for developing and implementing broad policies governing appropriate forms of faculty instruction during the period of any disruption. It is particularly important that units in which external accreditation is an issue have clear guidance from their accrediting agencies about the flexibility they have to implement alternative forms of instruction.

***Staff***

Academic support staff essential to the continuation of programs of instruction and research, identified and notified of their designation and responsibilities. Faculty and staff who fulfill these responsibilities should continue to receive their regular salaries during the period they are doing so. personnel actions, including leaves of absence for essential personnel, may be suspended during the period of the disruption.

***Students***

Students were given the greatest opportunity possible under the circumstances to continue their course work within the given procedures. Under this guidance, choose to request to make up the work at a later time.

***The quandary of essential personnel***

As stated, the anticipated absenteeism for this scenario is projected at 10-25%. For certain key

functions or for smaller departments, this level of absenteeism may lead to the quandary posed by designating "essential personnel." The failure to report to duty based on documented illness or documentation regarding sick family members is managed through existing policies; but a failure to report to duty based on fear, or the perceived need to protect ones' family, future, or livelihood is being evaluated by Human Resources with respect to current employee policies.

***Response level 4 – pandemic period***

The response level 4 is the Pandemic Period which is self-evident and is associated with widespread, efficient and virulent disease that is rooted throughout the Region IV-A. It is assumed that the healthcare delivery system is extremely over-taxed and most public services are minimized. There is widespread public distress. In this scenario, social distancing as described in the previous response level is assumed, and for the sake of this plan the temporary suspension of normal university operations is also assumed.

University operations was reduced to a minimal level necessary to maintain security, support students remaining on campus, sustain research models, and protect buildings. The performance of these functions was impacted by the assumption that there was a 40% absenteeism rate at any given time due to illness in the community. Additional absenteeism also is assumed due to illnesses encountered at home or fear of public travel. A 5% mortality rate is also assumed. LSPU strive to sustain minimal operations for a period. Historically there have been waves of this duration occurring in multiple cycles, prior to permanent deflation of disease rates.

***Research continuity in a pandemic***

The university seeks clarification from its major funding agencies with regard to their plans for extension of grant funding and reporting requirements in the case of an unavoidable disruption of funded research programs. In the event of any unavoidable disruptions, the impact on the research program will be identified and addressed with the funding agency. Faculty conducting research or supervising student research are responsible for ensuring safe and appropriate discontinuation of research activities.

### **Suspension of normal operations**

Another key consideration during a period of suspended normal operations was the maintenance of university buildings. Such activities include provision of minimal heat to avoid rupture of plumbing, providing minimally conditioned air to sustain computer systems, and providing clean and reliable sources of water and sanitary facilities to those areas where remaining personnel are maintaining operations for security forces, emergency response, decision-making, and other essential functions.

Maintaining a secure campus in such a scenario that become increasingly important as the University may be perceived as an area of refuge for those in distress. Further, capabilities of emergency response may be minimized and extra vigilance and monitoring of University facilities may be necessary to protect property and health.

The following items was stored in the Supply, Medical and Dental Services Office and in the Planning and Development office to be utilized in an emergency; and will be inventoried and receive regular inspection, respectively: masks, gloves, hand soap, paper towels, sanitizers, concentrated disinfectant, ready-to-use disinfectant spray, wiping cloths, buckets, and trash bags.

### **Response Level 5: Management of Pandemic Cases on Campus**

This response level is necessitated by a confirmed case of an emerging or re-emerging pathogen on the LSPU campus. It is feasible that a case of pandemic influenza, or some other illness, would first emerge in school community. Such finding would obviously contradict the incremental approach to pandemic preparations.

#### **Communication plan**

Throughout these various response levels, centralized and consistent communications is necessary. The ICTS office has conducted planning in anticipation of these response levels.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The university's aim is to develop a framework for leadership and faculty to assess their responses. Recognizing others may have opinions and/or

additional suggestions. It is the hope of the university to initiate discussions so that clear and effective plans are in place before future crises arise. Specific recommendations are discussed are as follows:

**1.** Management team preparation and training School officials with the ultimate responsibility for making and implementing action plans undergo crisis management preparations and training. In addition, rosters for task forces and advisory groups responsible for helping to draft these plans should be in place before a crisis arises. Committees and working groups should also include mental health experts, so that university leadership can access their expertise as they develop and execute plans.

**2. Education:** Universities need to develop and distribute situational criteria to determine when classes should be moved online. Second, accommodations are required to enable students to participate in delivery of online learning sessions. This includes recording online sessions to enable students to hear lectures missed due to non-academic obligations. In addition, financial consequences of such decisions must be considered and aid provided to students and faculty for purchasing necessary equipment. Third, students must recognize that faculty will likely increase responsibilities (e.g. homeschooling) and that flexibility is needed in scheduling lectures and meetings.

#### **3. Communication**

The institution must provide updates regarding the status of the university during pandemic. These communications must also be delivered with a single voice, as conflicting messages create tension and confusion. Because of time demands put on during a crisis, a recommendation on creating a crisis communications team that is directed by and answers to the academic officer. Faculty and staff may encourage asking questions, even if it means going outside of the "chain of command". Finally, institutions should appoint pandemic official/manager to confidentially address individual complaints and concerns.

## **DECLARATIONS**


I declare that this article is an original report of my research, has been written by me and has not been

submitted for any previous degree. The work is almost entirely my own work; due references have been provided on all supporting literatures and resources. I declare that this paper was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

### Corresponding author

Rina J. ARCIGAL;

Email: rina.arcigal0110@gmail.com

 ORCID: 0000-0002-8823-6522

### Author's contribution

RJ. Arcigal was the sole author of the article, starting from the conceptualization, development and all throughout the analysis of its data.

### Competing interests

The author declares no competing interest.

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Provincial Health Office of Laguna. J. De Leon St, Santa Cruz, 4009 Laguna, Philippines. <https://www.facebook.com/Provincial-Health-Office-Laguna-755601421462042/>

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Department of Health (DOH) repatriated 444 Overseas Filipinos (OFs) from the M/V Grand Princess cruise ship docked in the Port of Oakland in California, USA early morning of March 16, (2020).