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## Re-Opening Universities

The United States provides higher education better than any other country in the world. Students both from within and without have treasured a US diploma. A college degree has provided an enormous boost to human capital for US students over the post-World War II era, and international students will tell you that road to success comes with experience in an English language University – most of those Universities are in the United States

Your blogger has spent his adult life both as a student, and then as a faculty member, at several US universities. The largest value is in being TOGETHER – in classes, in dormitories, in social situations, in networking. All of these have been challenged by the strictures of the COVID-19 lockdown. In a thoughtful piece in the April 26, 2020 issue of the *New York Times*, Brown University President Christina Paxson states [“College Campuses Must Reopen in the Fall: Here’s How We Do It.”](#) President Paxson writes:

The reopening of college and university campuses in the fall should be a national priority. Institutions should develop public health plans now that build on three basic elements of controlling the spread of infection: *test, trace* and *separate* [emphasis added].

She speaks to the serious problems in the current setting. She writes “A typical dormitory has shared living and study spaces. A traditional lecture hall is not conducive to social distancing. Neither are college parties, to say the least.” She also speaks to the need for facilities to isolate students for quarantine and treatment.

The logistics are daunting. Consider a lecture hall set up with 20 rows of 10 seats each. How many students can sit in the lecture with social distancing? Consider laboratory sections in the hard sciences, with lab partners. Consider Friday evening “happy hours.”

At many universities, classrooms are cleaned once each day. Comfort facilities, water fountains, and sanitizing stations (if available) were designed for much different times. It is easy to predict the attendant costs of making these areas safe as running into the hundreds of thousands (or more) dollars.

The economics of reopening speaks to (at the very best) a “hybrid reopening.” At your blogger’s own university this would mean that classes of 10 or less might be able to meet in person. Computer and hard science labs would have to be continuously cleansed. Larger classes (until people can be safe sitting next to each other) will almost certainly have to remain online.

It is hard for your blogger to contemplate how the large dormitory settings at many universities will be made to work. Going to single room occupancy will

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either unleash large numbers of students into local apartment markets that are not ready for them, or lead them to stay home. Many dormitories have comfort facilities and dining halls that are shared by dozens to hundreds of students. To repeat, the logistics are daunting.

Academics went into their jobs because they love to teach others, and love to learn. The US University model has been sturdy, long-lasting, and productive. For now, it will have to change, and it will be expensive.

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